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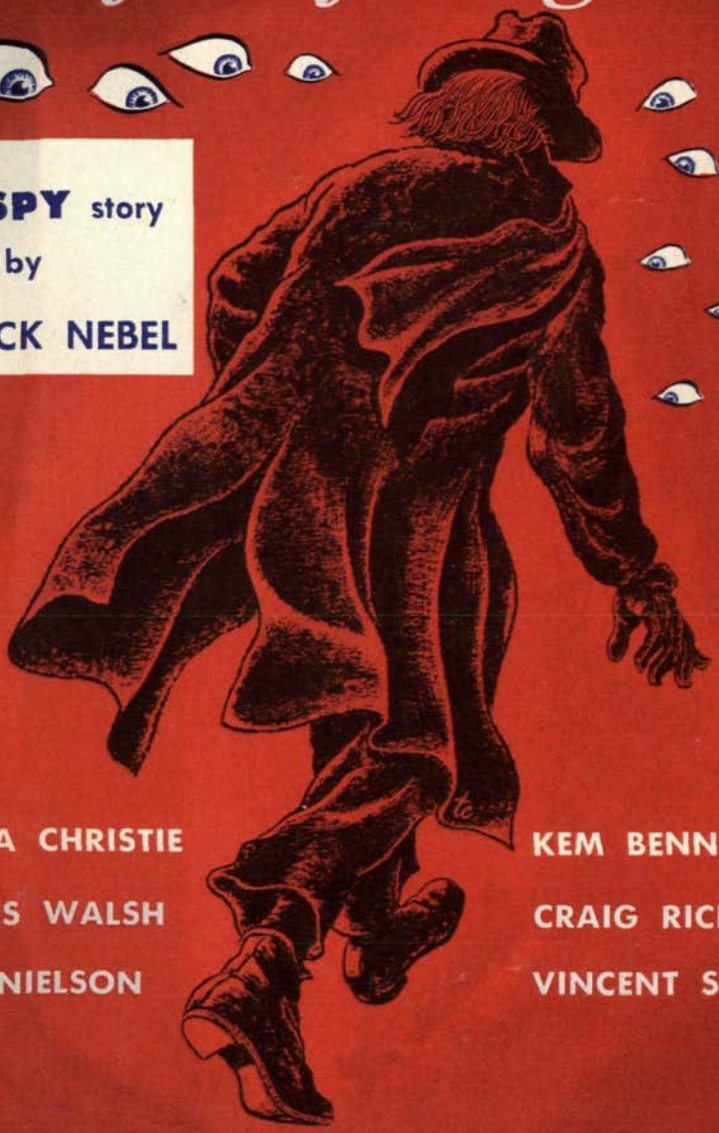

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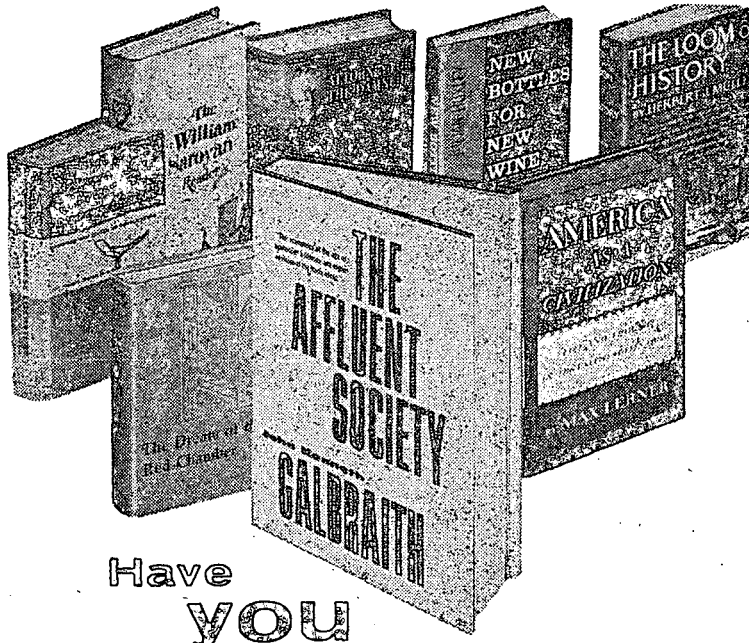

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a new Christmas story by

EDITOR'S FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**KEM BENNETT**
TITLE:	***The Flight of the Bumblebee***
TYPE:	Detective-Crime Story
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Five armed men hold up a busy Post Office three days before Christmas, with the police completely outmaneuvered ... What a lovely tickle! Easy as kiss-me-hand!*

THREE SHOPPING DAYS TO CHRISTmas. In Oxford Street, mounted along the frontage of a giant store, a row of plaster reindeer stared down with the pitying detachment of immortals at humanity in the mass. It was nine o'clock in the evening. Many of the shops were still open. Money was flowing. Cash registers maintained an endless tinkling pizzicato. Gifts cascaded off counters, out of shops, and into shopping baskets, brief cases, cars, taxis, pockets, and baby carriages.

Then, in one of the closed shops, a furrier's, a muffled explosion blew out a window and an alarm set up a frenzied clangor. The milling crowds hesitated. Heads jerked round. The police leaped into action. This was exactly what they were meant to do—for this was a false alarm, a diversion.

Not far away, quietly and efficiently, five armed men were raiding a Post Office. They had the staff pinned in the public part of the building, and behind the counters and in the back offices they were collecting the proceeds of the sale of thousands of stamps, thousands of postal orders, greetings telegrams, and savings certificates.

The Post Office alarm system was working. Bells were clanging in five police stations. But for a short time—for just long enough—police attention was concentrated

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on the Oxford Street furrier's...

The car slid in and out of the Baker Street traffic, not going too fast, not attracting attention to itself, but nevertheless covering the ground at twice the pace of its neighbors. It was a big car and it was going north. In the back, three men were transferring neatly banded packets of banknotes from the two large red G.P.O. sacks to an assortment of smaller, less suspicious containers. The boys were exultant. *What a lovely tickle! What a peach of a tickle! Easy as kiss-me-hand! King's bleeding ransom—looks like it, dunnit? All that lovely green stuff! Cor!*

"Bumble," said one of the men, a small, narrow-faced Maltese, "what you gonna buy Daisy—for Christmas, eh?"

There was a laugh. Bumble—known as the Bumblebee—was not notorious for generosity. And his wife, Daisy, much younger than he, was not notorious for her fidelity. Bumble's domesticity was a bruised and rotting apricot, and long ago he had stopped committing the stupidity of trying to gild the fruit back into lusciousness again.

Bumble, a big, plump, moon-faced man wearing a diplomat's hat and now struggling to get his arms into the sleeves of a dark overcoat with a velvet collar, said something viciously blasphemous that indicated Daisy would be lucky to get anything for Christmas better than a black eye and a thick ear.

And all the time the process of transferring the banknotes continued. Four attaché cases and five brief cases had been filled to bulging. Only one attaché case remained. Thus, there would be a brief case and an attaché case apiece for each of the five to carry. Yet one of the Post Office sacks was still half full.

Bumble had an unpleasantly high-pitched voice for a man his size. "Got more'n we thought," he said. "Should'a brought bigger cases. Should'a brought a cabin trunk, eh?" And he snickered with delighted excitement.

At the Marylebone Road crossing, a police car was waiting. The radio was active. One of the officers inside said, "There goes a black Humber. Better have a look." The police car surged forward.

Glancing through the back window of the Humber, Bumble said, "Bogeys, Arthur!"—and the driver of the getaway car hunched himself closer to the wheel.

At seventy miles an hour the Humber soared up Park Road, swung left into St. John's Wood Road by Lord's Cricket Ground, crashed the lights across Edgware Road, and gained fifty yards on the police who had to brake at Edgware Road to avoid a collision. In the back of the Humber the little Maltese was holding a high-powered portable spotlight which was plugged into terminals on the car's dashboard.

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The police gained again. The cars swung right and left, then right again into Shirland Road—and at that moment the Humber's driver shouted, "Now!"

The Maltese switched on the spotlight, aiming it through the rear window straight into the eyes of the police driver as he held his car into the bend. It was an extremely powerful light. Dazzled, the policeman lost control and the official car hit a traffic island, careened across the road, smashed into a lamp-post, and stopped.

The Humber throbbed away.

Less than five minutes later, deep in the maze of slum streets between Kilburn Lane and Harrow Road, the thieves abandoned the Humber. This was not unpremeditated—they had expected to be chased. Now the plan was to scatter, each carrying his share of the loot. They scattered. The Bumblebee was the last out of the car. He had half a sackful of pound notes to carry as well as his two cases. He was, in a sense, the leader—responsible to the bigger man who had thought up the tickle, planned it, and reconnoitered the ground. By the time the Bumblebee got properly going, because he was fat and slow-moving as well as being overloaded, the four others were some distance away.

Bumble trotted away from the car, twisting and turning in the narrow streets. At the same time his mind was alert. He knew the district—he had been brought up in it. It came to this: if the bogeys in the crashed car had been knocked out, he was probably in the clear; if, on the other hand, the bogeys, or one of them, had been able to use his radio, things could get nasty.

As Bumble approached Kilburn Lane, he saw a police car slam to a halt and unload five uniformed men. He knew then that he was in trouble: things *had* got nasty. He turned and faded away, soft-footed, into the small ill-lit streets again. "Don't get the wind up," he told himself. "Take it easy and you'll be all right. Lie low for an hour or two—that's the thing to do."

During the war Bumble had been a deserter from the Navy. After the war he had lived for a month or two in an air-raid shelter built on a bombed site not far from where he was now. This was what he made for, praying that the shelter still stood there.

It did. It was in a long narrow street bounded on both sides by the walls of factories. Bumble reached it through back alleys and back gardens, the secret ways of his kind, and he reached it unobserved.

The following morning was bright and sunlit with a chill wind. Soon after dawn the Bumblebee awakened in his shelter. He was shivering and miserable. He had not meant to sleep. He had sat for

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hours in his smelly, derelict, damp and littered hideout, listening for footsteps, wishing that he had taken a risk and made a clean getaway before the hunt had had the chance to get organized, wondering how the others had fared, wondering if he ought to move, wondering if the police had the area cordoned ... In the end he had slept because his flabby body had demanded sleep and Bumble's will could rarely deny his body anything.

He went to the shelter entrance and looked out cautiously. Nothing. No sign of bogeys. The little street was deserted.

Bumble sat down on the half sackful of pound notes in the dimness of the shelter. He yearned for a cup of tea. He glanced at his watch. Ten to eight. His thoughts, sluggish as bats in daytime, stirred. "'Ave to move soon ... Lucky no bogeys been sniffin' around already." The yearning for something hot to drink came back and he wasted several minutes feeling sorry for himself. Then urgency prompted thought into action again. He'd have to leave the sack—that was a dead giveaway, that was. Could he just walk out, maybe, when the streets filled up a bit? All depended, didn't it? If the bogeys had the area tied up, then it'd be chancy. Only thing to do though — walk out, bright and cheerful, like some business geezer off to open his shop for another day's Christmas trade.

Slowly, after scratching round in his sharp but shallow mind for alternative plans of action, Bumble settled on his original one—none of the alternatives seemed more attractive. As soon as his mind was firmly made up he felt better. He hefted the sack and grunted with greedy approval before starting to stow bundles of pound notes into every available pocket. When he had finished he was a bulky-looking person indeed. He then brushed his coat and pulled his Homburg, also filled with pound notes, carefully down on his round, bald head. The sack still contained banknotes to the value of more than two hundred pounds, but he kicked it into the corner of the shelter with a pleasant feeling of lordly unconcern. "Some feller," he told himself, "is goin' to 'ave a lucky find. Good luck to 'im."

At half-past eight Bumble went again to the shelter entrance and glanced cautiously out into the street. About a hundred yards away, coming toward him, was a woman pushing a baby carriage.

Bumble waited for the woman to pass. Then, suddenly, with one of those flashes of inspiration that come to all men, if rarely at the right moment, a wonderful idea leaped fully formed in his brain. He snickered to himself. What a wheeze! Ruddy well brilliant, that's what it was! He quickly retrieved the sack from the far end of the shelter, then took out his pistol, a

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well-worn Belgian automatic that looked more dangerous than it was.

The woman with the perambulator was now level with the shelter entrance. Bumble noted without emotion that she was a young woman, dark and pretty and nicely formed. He stepped out of hiding, gun in hand, sack in the other. He and the young woman and the infant in the carriage were alone in the street.

"Don't shout, ducks," Bumble said. "You shout and I'll kill the kid, see." The young woman let out a strangled little wail of fear and shock. "Shut up, I told yer!" Bumble snarled. He looked frightening—with the gun and the pretentious elegance of his velvet-collared coat and formal hat.

Holding the gun on the girl, he quickly stuffed his two cases and the sack under the carriage's waterproof cover. Then he took the handle of the perambulator in his left hand and thrust his right, holding the gun, into his coat pocket. He jerked his head at the girl.

"We're goin' shoppin', see ducks? Just a happy little family goin' to do our Christmas shoppin'. You tag along and keep yer trap shut and it'll be all right. Now, get moving and don't arst any silly questions!"

The police had caught three of Bumble's confederates the night before. Only Bumble and the little Maltese, who was slippery as an eel and quick-witted, had evaded them. They had also found the abandoned Humber. They knew from the accounts of the Post Office employees that there had been five raiders. They had garbled descriptions to work from—but that was all.

So, just in case, they had cordoned off the area in which they had found the Humber and made their three captures. At the junction of Kilburn Lane and Chamberlayne Road, not more than a quarter of a mile from Bumble's air-raid shelter, five uniformed men were checking all cars, buses, and pedestrians. John Harrison, the biggest and youngest of the five policemen, was responsible for pedestrians on the north side of Kilburn Lane. He stood in a shop doorway, his eyes moving constantly, trying hard to keep fresh in his mind the description of the two wanted men—one small, dark, and foreign-looking, the other big, bulky, bald, and round-faced. It was likely, the sergeant had told him, that the men would be carrying bags of some kind—unless they had managed to cache the loot.

John Harrison was a good policeman, but not a very intelligent one. He was a Rugby player, and his big body was capable of answering almost any demand on it. He was also a naturally good-humoured and phlegmatic individual, not liable to lose his head. But his imagination was a blunt instrument and

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this job—scanning a hundred faces in as many seconds and making an instantaneous judgment on each—demanded more from his wit and intuition than his mind was able to offer. So he was restive and uncomfortable, half convinced every few minutes that he had either seen one of the men or that he had missed them.

As the clocks along the street were saying a quarter to nine, the Bumblebee and the girl approached the Chamberlayne Road crossing. Already, from a hundred yards away, Bumble had spotted the police activity at the crossroads. Inside, he was a turmoil of alternating fear and confidence. Externally, because he was a surprisingly good actor for a man of his type, he seemed cheerful and doting. As he walked he leaned forward from time to time and made faces and popping noises at the little six-month-old boy in the pram he was pushing. Beside him the pretty girl, her face set, walked automatically, giving no trouble, saying nothing, seeming to be paralyzed by the threat to her child.

John Harrison saw Bumble when he was five yards away. The policeman's big face changed. He scowled. He came out of his doorway. "Here," he said. "Here, you! You with the Homburg hat—"

Bumble ran for it.

He had only covered thirty yards when John Harrison sent him crashing to the pavement with a Rugby tackle.

And that, as far as the Bumblebee was concerned, was the end of the tickle....

Just before midday, smiling at the memory of kind words and a hint of possible promotion from his Superintendent, John Harrison entered the canteen attached to his station. He bought himself a cup of strong, dark tea and took it across to where Albert Bates, one of his special mates, was sitting. Albert grinned at him. "Attaboy, Johnny," he said. "Done yourself a bit of good this morning, eh? Super give you a kiss behind the ear?"

John Harrison grinned back. "He didn't go as far as that," he said, "but all the same I can't grumble."

Albert Bates nodded. "Good-oh." There was a pause. Then Bates said, "How did you recognize the perisher? I'm sure I wouldn't have—he's got a lot fatter since his last picture was taken."

John Harrison sipped his tea. "Well..." he said hesitantly. Then suddenly he grinned and leaned forward, speaking in a confidential whisper. "What would you have done, Albert," he said, "if you'd seen a big flashy-looking geezer in a velvet-collared coat walkin' down Kilburn Lane with *your* wife, pushin' *your* kid in *your* new pram, and behavin' as if he owned the lot of 'em?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**THOMAS WALSH**
TITLE:	***The Second Chance***
TYPE:	Cop Story
DETECTIVE:	Mike Anderson
LOCALE:	New York State
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Should one mistake wash up a person's life? Doesn't every man have something hidden in his past, some black spot? If so, didn't Eddie Winton deserve a second chance?*

THERE WERE A FEW NEW CABINET radios in the window of the store and several advertising placards propped up around them. A sign over the entrance read: *Eddie's Radio Roundup — Service With a Smile.* On the door itself, in small letters just over the knob, there was a name: *E. Wilson.* Mike Anderson stared at that for a moment, then took a snapshot out of his overcoat pocket and got the face on it fixed firmly in his mind. Wilson, Winton—as he opened the door and went in he wondered why they never changed their names very much. This one had even kept the Eddie.

Somewhere behind the wooden partition in back of the counter a bell tinkled. After a moment or two the swing door pushed out and a young man came through, wiping his hands on a bit of rag.

"Hello," Mike Anderson said and nodded casually. "I'm looking for the Eddie Wilson who runs this place. You the boss?"

The young man grinned. "The boss," he said, "and all the help. I'm Eddie. Is it something about a radio?"

"Not exactly," Mike Anderson told him. He saw that this Eddie looked alert and friendly and pretty smart — twenty-four or -five, light hair all right, light eyes, a little older-looking, a touch heavier, than

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the picture in Mike Anderson's pocket. But that picture had been taken five years ago.

"I'm looking for a party," Mike Anderson said. His small brown eyes, deceptively dull in a moonlike, middle-aged face, watched Eddie carefully without appearing to. "This party probably showed up here three, four years ago. From New York. I don't know whether that fits you. Maybe you've been here all your life."

The face across from him whitened and got tight, but in an instant the grin came back—a stiff, forced grin that gave an unnatural twist to the lips. For quite a while he just leaned on the counter and stared at Mike Anderson as if he'd forgotten there was an answer to make. Then he said, "No," suddenly, and had to clear his throat to say it. "Not all my life, mister. Four years."

"Coming from?"

"Hartford," Eddie said. But he said it after a moment's pause, in a rush, the first name, Mike Anderson knew, that had popped into his mind.

"Born there," Mike Anderson nodded, "and brought up there, too, maybe? Never been to New York?"

"What?" Eddie asked huskily. He hesitated. "What? No. Never been to New York. Never—"

"I thought," Mike Anderson told him stolidly, "you might be this party I was looking for—this Eddie Winton. The names are pretty much the same. He lit out of New York after driving the getaway car in a jewelry store stickup. We got two of the others but we never collared this Eddie. He dropped out of sight right after that—I guess just about the time you came here. Here's a picture of him his landlady found when she cleaned out his room—"

The snapshot stayed a long while in Eddie's hands—so long that Mike Anderson had to wonder why they all played for time. They all seemed to think that if they stalled long enough they could get out of it.

"You might just happen to look like this Eddie Winton—that picture ain't proof. But we got his fingerprints off the car door and we kept them on file. And prints you can't argue with—they're yours or they aren't. I guess you know that."

"Yes," Eddie said. "Sure." He put the picture down slowly, wetting his lips, twisting them as if he wanted to get some feeling there. But when he spoke they jerked a little as if he couldn't quite control them. "You're a cop?"

"That's right."

"Yes," Eddie said again. He rubbed the heel of his palm slowly across his forehead. "I guess I knew. What you're talking about happened four years ago, mister. It happened just once—after it was over this Winton saw what it was really like. He found out it wasn't tough or romantic or anything like he

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imagined. He felt sick and scared and he didn't wait to get his cut. He just got out and stayed out because he didn't want to mix up in anything like that again as long as he lived."

"You're this Eddie Winton?" Mike Anderson asked.

"Say he came here, to this town. He was always a good mechanic, mister. He could do anything with tools. Here he got a job and worked hard and people liked him. After a while he went into business for himself and he did all right." Unsteadily he drew in a long breath. "Next month he was going to get married to a girl he met here. He was out of it all, he might have figured. He thought just one mistake wouldn't wash up his life. Why should it?"

Leaning over the counter, he gripped Mike Anderson's arm, as if he knew what must happen now, and yet if he talked, if he could make this other man see how it was—

"Come on," Mike Anderson said. He felt sorry for this Eddie but he had spent a good part of his life learning that these things were never helped by talking about them. They were set and ordered, and there was nothing he could do about them; it was better, and maybe kinder, too, to get it over with as fast as you could. Settling his shoulders inside his heavy coat he grunted, "Get started, kid. We're going down to New York. Want to lock up here before you leave?"

Hopelessness formed and spread in the face so close to his; it turned bitterly away.

"Why?" Eddie said, his voice catching suddenly on a dry, harsh note. "Why should I? Do you think I can ever come back?"

There was no train that afternoon, nor that night; and Mike Anderson was cursing unreadable timetables at his hotel when someone mentioned the plane. It had been quartered at the edge of town for a month or two, while its pilot had scrabbled a living out of lessons and sightseeing trips at two dollars a head; and the room clerk mentioned to Mike Anderson that he had heard Mr. Kollecker had chartered it for a flight to Albany that afternoon.

Mr. Kollecker was E. Ambrose Kollecker, a portly, rather pompous man who looked like a judge and spoke as if he were reading from a law book. It developed that he had indeed chartered the plane, and he would be only too happy to share the cost, if they wanted to come along. He was a little curious about the reason for their trip, but Mike Anderson did not inform him, or anybody. He could, he thought, give the kid that much of a break.

Out at the field, when the girl Eddie had phoned to showed up—the one he'd been going to marry next month—Mike Anderson left them alone as much as he could.

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Mary Something—a nice-looking dark-haired girl she was, with a soft steady voice that shook only once, when Eddie kissed her, and told her huskily not to worry, and she said of course she wouldn't worry, because there was nothing to worry about. They'd let him go—they'd have to, when they found out what he'd been doing these past four years. Next week he'd be back; and he'd feel better because it was all over, because he'd never have to worry about it any more. When they circled the field and Mike Anderson looked down at it he could see her standing where they had left her, head still raised, waving her hand.

She was so tiny there, so small and helpless far below them, that she made Mike Anderson feel vaguely uneasy, suddenly impressed by the careless chances that ruled a man's life. There was a policeman in New York who remembered faces—what would the right mathematical odds be that he'd have a niece in this town where Eddie Winton had hid out, and that one day at a picnic she'd take a picture of the crowd, and send it to her uncle, with Eddie Winton's face just caught in one corner? A thousand to one—maybe a million to one. Yet it happened, and her uncle had looked at the slightly blurred features and remembered Eddie Winton.

He had written to his niece; and she told him about Eddie, and that he must be wrong. Eddie Wilson, she was positive, was one of the nicest boys she knew. But Mike Anderson had had to go to Syracuse; and they told him to stop in the town, and look over this Eddie Wilson, on the chance. He had; it was his job.

A sad job, and a sad world, Mike Anderson thought gloomily. Below them the field drew back and vanished; the girl was a doll, a dot, nothing. The Adirondacks rolled up now above narrow valleys covered with the dull dark green of winter woods; peak after peak shouldered up to rocky slopes and drew back northward like the waves of a frozen brown sea. All Mike Anderson could distinguish were those peaks and a thick, tangled mass of woods stretching away as far as the eye could reach—no roads, no houses, no smoke, no men.

Time went by slowly; Eddie Winton stared through the window; E. Ambrose Kollecker frowned over typewritten papers taken from his brief case. There was nothing for Mike Anderson to do but to look alternately at his watch and the ground, and shiver occasionally in the unheated air of the small cabin. Twenty minutes passed, forty, fifty—it was just past the hour, the halfway mark to Albany, when something broke the harsh drumming of the engine as sharply as if a knife had sheared sound track from a film.

Mike Anderson didn't know

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what had happened; he only knew that his insides were pulled so suddenly out of him that he felt empty, cold clear through. The engine sputtered, coughed, raced up, stopped, sputtered again; Kollecker looked up from his papers and stared at Mike Anderson with startled eyes.

After that everything was jumbled together. They lost altitude; the forest widened and spread out; the hills swept up in one mighty motion high against the horizon, above them. One moment they were safe, quite placid and swift above the frozen woods; in another moment they were dropping lower, lower, down a steep slope into a valley, past twin hills that shot up suddenly on either side of them, so close that as they passed a wing seemed to skim each massive bank.

Trees blurred by; and then in a flash of time they were past the trees, racing across an upward stretch of clear ground behind the erratic sputtering of the motor. The nose of the plane tilted up; they struck the earth, bounced high, bounced forward, hit again. A solitary tree seemed to spring from the ground before them and fling itself upon their wing like a living thing. Closing his eyes, throwing an arm instinctively across his face at the crunch and tear of shattered metal, Mike Anderson shot forward violently as they struck.

It was unbelievable that nothing happened after that. They were stopped, they were steady; someone yanked open the cabin door and they scrambled down to the ground. The stocky pilot stood there already, staring at the shattered wing, his hands on his hips, cursing. No one seemed to be hurt very much; Kollecker's cheek and right hand were bruised, Mike Anderson's shoulder ached a little, the pilot seemed to be favoring one ankle, and Eddie Winton rubbed his arm.

For a moment in which no one spoke Mike Anderson had the odd feeling that silence was flowing over the sounds of their crash like water coming together over a sinking pebble. Then Kollecker said, "Here, Brady—what's wrong with your plane? What happened?"

The pilot was a sawed-off chunk of a man with a weather-beaten face and blue dabs of ice for eyes. "What happened," he told Kollecker harshly, "is that we're all lucky as fools to get down safe in country like this. If you're worrying about your appointment in Albany, forget it now; in an hour it won't be important, even to you."

"Eh?"

"Your hide," Brady said. He looked around them with narrowed eyes. "I was brought up in country like this—I know you could draw a circle twenty miles around and not find a rat alive in it. There have been men lost in here they gave up looking for. That's our spot."

The lawyer looked at him foolishly.

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"Then what are we to do?"

"Walk," Brady said. He hunched one shoulder toward the west. "Highland Lake is somewhere back there — ten miles, fifteen, twenty, maybe. It's long enough so that if we keep straight west we can't miss it. There'll be hunting lodges open for the—"

He broke off and held up his hand to something that fluttered down out of the leaden gray sky.

"Snow." His lips tightened as he looked at his palm. "Just to make it perfect. We'll start now and walk all night if we have to—once it's too deep to get through we're done. If any of you feel like quitting, remember that. And I wouldn't take my bag and that brief case, Kollecker; they're going to get pretty heavy in an hour or two."

"Nonsense," E. Ambrose Kollecker said. He clambered out of the plane and picked up the bag and the leather portmanteau from where they had landed on the ground.

The pilot shrugged. "Your party," he said. "Let's get started."

They followed Brady, in single file, toward the west. Presently dusk dropped about them, steel gray and quiet. It was very cold, and the white flakes came down thicker now, but still as friendly and soft as ever. When it grew quite dark Brady would flick on the flashlight now and again, throwing a white path of light before him, and showing the countless patches of whiteness that appeared as if by magic against the trees, the underbrush, the vague shadows ahead.

Once there was a crash, and then another, as Kollecker flung his bags away. "Where are we going?" he panted to Brady. "Do you think it's far now?"

Brady did not answer that. They went on again in their silent file.

Once the thought struck Mike Anderson that in the darkness and the storm all Eddie Winton had to do to escape was to step by and let them go on; they would not see him, nor miss him until it would be too late for hope of capturing him again. But that, Mike Anderson saw immediately, was improbable. There were worse things than prison—the woods out there, the cold, the loneliness, the silence. Things a man—

There was a commotion in the darkness ahead of him; going forward, Mike Anderson almost fell across a body. Brady turned the flash down and he saw it to be Kollecker, struggling to get up. "I'll go on," he said. "I'm all right. Don't leave me, Brady!"

His eyes were bloodshot, his voice an agonized whisper. On his feet he went forward blindly a few steps and then fell again, his hat rolling off into the snow. Mike Anderson and Eddie got him up, crying weakly, begging them not to leave him. He was all right. If he could only get five minutes' rest—

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Brady flashed the light around them. There was a sharp rise of ground on their right, clustered with rocks at the bottom, and in the middle of the rocks a shallow depth partly roofed across by an overhang of stone.

"We could lie up for a while," Brady said. "I guess this is as good a place as we'll find. Let's see if we can have a fire."

For the first time Mike Anderson noticed a tortured whiteness in Brady's face, and the way his lips came together when the weight of his body went onto his left leg. "A twist," Brady grunted, catching his eye. "Got it in the crack-up. Nothing much."

But when he knelt to pick up Kollecker's hat Mike Anderson got a glimpse of Brady's ankle. It was badly swollen, as thick as a man's calf; it must have been agony for him to walk on it. "Stay here with Kollecker," he told him. "We'll get the wood."

With Eddie Winton he collected underbrush and dead, brittle branches, old wood that took a long while catching; but the flame in Kollecker's metal lighter held steady and caught at last, so that soon a blaze sprang up and crackled and snapped before them. It had little heat in it, and strong smoke; but it was nonetheless bright and cheerful.

Brady peered at his watch. "A quarter to ten now," he said. "That means we've been walking six hours. If we were within ten miles of the lake when we landed we should be almost there now."

Even Kollecker was a little heartened by that hope. They smoked cigarettes and spoke more freely, rest and the touch of heat easing the weariness and chill in their bodies. Leaning back against the rock, his hat tipped forward over his eyes and his legs stretched out to the fire, Kollecker dozed; but beside him Eddie Winton's sharp young face gazed broodingly into the flames.

He shared their problem, Mike Anderson thought, and yet he carried something else too, that none of the others suspected.

It was too bad, Mike Anderson thought drowsily. After that, like Kollecker, he must have dozed for a while, because suddenly the fire was very low, and the icy air clenched stiff fingers around the spot of flame. Apparently they all had dozed but Brady; he was smoking quietly before the rock, arms resting on one jacked-up knee.

It was still snowing.

"We'd better get started again," the pilot said, as Mike Anderson sat up. "If we wait till morning we'll be snowed in here. I don't know how far we are from Highland Lake but perhaps we're closer than I think we are. It's a chance, anyway — it's better than sitting around and waiting to be trapped here."

That all seemed logical to Mike

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Anderson. He stood up, stretched his stiff limbs, and woke the others. After they had formed the file again and started off he looked back once at the fire—at the small, rosy core of flame shining at them through the darkness and the snow. They were suckers, Mike Anderson thought, to leave it. West—who could say in this furious, speckled blackness where west was now?

He grunted and went on after the others, dispirited and utterly tired, but with a dogged determination in him too.

Mike Anderson never forgot that night, although it was disconnected and only vaguely terrifying afterward, like the imperfectly remembered picture of a nightmare. You could recall darkness and stinging cold, the snapping of great trees like rifle shots around you when you could not recall the degree of those things, their naked, terrible intensity that was like nothing you had ever before known. At times a white beam of light would dance out from Brady's hand, widening and then dimming before them, showing great flakes falling gently through it, friendly and countless, closing them in, hushing sound, piling up deeper and deeper under their feet.

They went on and on, through air so cold that it hurt to breathe it, so thin that his lungs couldn't seem to draw in enough to fill them. They fought their way through underbrush, across valleys, up slopes; at the top of one Brady turned on the flash and rested his back against a tree.

"I'm done," he said thickly. "I'm holdings things up—me and Kollecker. You go on—send back help. You and Wilson."

Mike Anderson's thighs felt so flabby that when he stopped his body almost started to buckle down. He shook his head.

"Fifty-five," he said, with a ghastly grin, prodding his chest with a thumb that had no feeling in it. "Wilson might get through—alone. Not with me."

Kollecker was whispering to himself, softly and confidentially. Somehow he twisted out of Mike Anderson's grasp and ran blindly forward, pitching down flat when he had gone half a dozen steps. Mike Anderson went over to him and got him up, and then watched Eddie Winton look at him with a crooked grin from the edge of the clearing.

Then Eddie Winton was gone, there were only three of them stumbling on, and presently, when Kollecker tore loose again and plunged forward, Mike Anderson saw there was no need to chase him. He'd go five steps, six, and fall again.

Grayness crept down through the air so gradually it was impossible to tell when it reached them. It seemed unbelievable to Mike Anderson that he could see the form of trees again, beautiful with frost, motionless and desolate in the un-

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colored light of dawn. Once, at the bottom of a slope, the staff slid out sideways from Brady and he fell just as Kollecker floundered down behind him. Somehow Mike Anderson got the pilot up, and between them they raised Kollecker; but after that it seemed foolish to go on.

Even the lawyer seemed to understand that. "I will tell you about it," he said to Mike Anderson, quite earnestly and calmly, putting a hand on his wrist as if the detective had been a friend he wished to detain a moment on the street. "Let's rest here, and I will tell you. Of course he was my friend—that's why I was named guardian for his daughter. I took the money, yes—I had to. But I paid it back, every dollar, and no one knew what I had done. But sometimes I wonder about it, I dream that I could not get the money to put back, and I wake covered with sweat. Why should it worry me now? Why do I keep on thinking about it?"

He broke off there and tried to run again, but his legs wouldn't hold him up; he collapsed by the stump.

Brady, chuckling faintly, his face lined by fatigue and the constant agony of his ankle, looked at Mike Anderson.

"End of the line," he whispered penetratingly. "They say it's a pleasant death as deaths go—you just fall off to sleep. E. Ambrose is ready for it, confession and all. Is confession good for the soul? Would it—"

A curious look crossed his face—an expression Mike Anderson could not define very well. It did not seem important, and his words as he went on blurred in Mike Anderson's ears—here and there he'd catch a phrase, a sentence. Something about a friend this Brady had once had, long ago, as boy; and a canoe ride they'd taken, and a storm that came up. 'Way off from land; after it overturned Brady clung to the canoe, and his friend clung to him. But Brady hammered him off Panicky, he knocked away his hands. The friend drowned, and when Brady was saved hours later he had told how he'd tried to hold his friend up, and everyone thought of him as a hero.

Hunger and extreme exhaustion roused a brittle humor in Mike Anderson—a capricious sense of lightheadedness. He sat down in the snow by the other two, and took out his revolver. It felt big and comforting in his hand, and when far-off trees cracked twice, like the reports of a rifle, he raised the revolver and fired carefully at a tree thirty feet away. It was pleasant enough sitting there, he thought, listening to the wind, and to Brady's whispering voice, without having to make any effort. What Brady was saying he did not know; after a while the voice stopped, and Brady put his head on his knees as if he were going to sleep.

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Mike Anderson envied him. He wished that he did not hear the little vague things that gathered together, whispering, in the midst of the white-tipped trees to watch them there, and to wait; if it had not been for them he'd have gone to sleep, too.

Cunningly, bending forward like the pilot, Mike Anderson pretended to be as quiet as the others. It should not be hard to fool those whispering things, he thought; and he stayed motionless for minutes, his head bent on his arms, until he heard the sounds of their feet.

Then he raised his head and his gun swiftly, and saw them distinctly against the snow. There was only a breath of pressure between his finger and the trigger as they shouted to him and came running forward. Not vague little things—men! Men....

At the lodge on Highland Lake they ate enormously of steak and coffee and fried potatoes; and then Mike Anderson, at last, fell asleep at the table.

It was late afternoon when he awoke, and in the big living room men sat around and talked to him. Eddie Winton, they told him, had hammered at the door just after dawn; and when he had told them the story they had dressed and started the search. But it wasn't until they had heard Mike Anderson's pistol shots answering their own that they had any success.

Mike Anderson didn't tell them how he'd happened to fire; he was ashamed of that silliness now.

Presently the others got up, too, and they had supper, and then sat around a roaring fire. One of the guides was going into town; there was a train, he told them, at half-past eight, going up the line to the little town they'd left yesterday afternoon. If any of them wanted to get home that night, he'd drop them off; it would be no trouble. The pilot and E. Ambrose Kollecker accepted with thanks. Eddie Winton stared silently into the fire.

It was funny, Mike Anderson thought—back there in the woods they had been four men together, sharing what they had of courage and comradeship. Four men scared and tired, and each with a secret in his heart. For he had one, too, Mike Anderson — he'd been alive fifty-five years, and he was no saint. Every man seemed to have something hidden in his life, some black spot; most men, through luck or brains, kept it buried. Eddie Winton would have kept it buried, too, but for a picture of an outing, and a man down in New York who had a fine memory for faces.

It would be all right, Mike Anderson thought, if he were God, and could arrange things as he wanted. Then he could go back and say, why it wasn't the fellow at all. What's the matter, Pottsy — losing your knack? They'd believe him; why shouldn't they? Eddie Winton

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would get married to that girl, and run his store, and have kids and work hard and hold his head up.

"How about you?" the guide said then, and looked at Eddie Winton.

But Mike Anderson would have to bring him in; he was a cop, and he had a job to do. It might be too bad but still—still, Mike Anderson saw suddenly, he had to play God on one side or the other. Brady and Kollecker had told him things back in the woods, but those things were forgotten now. It was only Eddie Winton, who four years ago, a smart young city punk, had mixed himself up in a jam, who had a secret that would not be forgotten. And yet maybe he had lost something back there in the woods, too. A smart young city punk would have kept his mouth closed about the others; he'd have gone into town tonight and taken a train somewhere, to one of the thousands of towns where no one knew who he was, where he'd be safe. But he hadn't done that. He had sent help back. Would Brady? Mike Anderson thought. Would I?

A man couldn't avoid the choice; he had to make it now, and he couldn't stall. He'd do his job, of course; he—

"Go ahead," he said to Eddie Winton. "Might as well go back with them. Our business wasn't important. I'll tell the boss you're going to get married."

Eddie Winton lifted his head; his eyes shone in the reflected light of the fire.

"Listen," he said huskily, don't—"

"A clerical error," Mike Anderson explained, "about some stuff sent out from the factory. We thought it went to Wilson here, but he says it didn't and I'll take his word. Down there they're always getting hold of the wrong guy."

He didn't feel ashamed or guilty; he felt pretty good. You didn't, Mike Anderson thought, get a chance to play God often; but when it was up to you—why, it kind of settled itself.

After that he dozed; and then the guide was ready to go, and Brady and Kollecker and Eddie Winton shook hands with him. The lawyer muttered something about hysteria, and the absurd things it made a man say and do; Brady grinned tightly and said that was right.

Eddie Winton said thanks, and Mike Anderson slapped his arm. "Okay," he said. "Take it from here, kid. So long."

He went back to sleep after the door closed, because he wasn't worried at all, only very tired, and there was no train to New York until the morning. The only thing he dreamed about was the look on Pottsy's fat face when Mike Anderson would tell him he'd been seeing things. That, and this Mary Something, and the look on her face when Eddie came back.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Leonardo da Vinci, Detective***

TYPE: Historical Detective Story

LOCALE: France

TIME: The year 1516

COMMENTS: *What crime would the great Leonardo be asked to investigate? An "impossible" crime, to be sure—a "locked room" that paradoxically had not a single door or window . . . And what a master Leonardo proved himself!*

ON A FINE LATE-SPRING AFTERNOON in 1516, Leonardo da Vinci sat peacefully in the rose-embowered garden behind his mansion near Amboise, with a sketching pad upon his lap, drawing a golden oriole which fluttered occasionally within the confines of a large aviary. Although the Italian master was over sixty now, white-bearded and slightly stooped, the hand that had painted *The Last Supper* and *Mona Lisa* had lost none of its deftness, nor his eyes their keen brilliance. All around rose the gentle, sun-warmed hills of central France, and the bees hummed in the chaparral.

His young servant Jacques stepped hesitantly from the terrace to confront him, then spoke softly.

"Maître, a gentleman from Amboise. He demands to see you."

Leonardo nodded kindly, but before the boy could turn to deliver the message, a tall, sturdy black-haired figure with a thick beard strode across the terrace.

"Ah, Monsieur Blanchard," Leonardo said sympathetically. "You shatter the sylvan peace with your distress. Sit down and observe the golden oriole with me. I do not care to take the bird into captivity like this, but the oriole is most difficult to sketch in its natural habitat—"

"You mistake me, Monsieur," the man said. "I am not Monsieur Blanchard."

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"Have my eyes lost their skill?" Leonardo said, blinking up at him. "Indeed, they must have, for you are not the King's minister after all!"

"I am Baron de Marigny, at your service. The Queen is most anxious that you come to Amboise at once."

"The Queen!" Leonardo looked surprised. His Majesty, Francis I, of the House of Valois, favored him. He had invited Leonardo to live in France, had given him this house, opened the castle at Amboise to him, and often sought his company. But the Queen! The regal French beauty had never liked him and had not dissembled from the first.

"How can my humble services be of value to the Queen?" Leonardo asked, temporizing.

"She gave me explicit orders to discuss nothing. At the same time —" Marigny's eyes shifted uneasily to the flutterings of the oriole. "His Majesty was not in favor of her calling you at all."

"But he permitted her to do so?"

"Yes. The Queen's whims are not easily discouraged."

"Then I shall come at once," Leonardo said, moving towards the terrace. "Ever to investigate, to *know* — especially when it is a Queen's whim. Jacques, my cloak!"

The coach carrying Leonardo and the Baron jolted along the narrow, poplar-lined road to within a hundred metres of the grey, rounded contours of the castle, and then debouched into a green open field to the west towards gently rising hills, perhaps a kilometre distant.

"We approach the amphitheatre?" Leonardo asked.

"That is where it happened," Marigny said absently. Then his lips thinned and tightened. "They are waiting for you there. They will explain everything."

The coach drew up in a cloud of dust at the entrance of the amphitheatre, which lay to the south. Here Francis, passionately fond of tournaments, masquerades, and amusements of all kinds, provided outdoor entertainment for himself, his court, and his guests. Colored flags fluttered from tall masts, announcing the afternoon's gala entertainment, already concluded, and nearly everyone had now departed except a small group sitting beneath a striped canopy inside a circle of soldiers. Leonardo recognized the King and Queen and their retinue.

The minister Blanchard approached Leonardo, his arms outstretched, his pale face smudged with perspiration and dust.

"This is terrible, Monsieur da Vinci. Monsieur Laurier has been stabbed in the chest and lies dead within the amphitheatre. Her Majesty wishes you to investigate this crime and demands to see you at once."

Leonardo nodded and strode like a noble patriarch to the others sitting beneath the awning. Arriving

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before the royal pair, Leonardo bowed deeply.

The King, handsome in his large-nosed way, acknowledged the greeting wearily, but his eyes were alert and watchful.

"Before the Queen speaks to you, Leonardo, let me say that I did not wish to disturb you. She is upset and may say things that are personal and uncomplimentary, but I ask you to make allowances. A friend of ours, Philip Laurier, lies dead out on that field. Murdered."

"A foul, most flaunting deed!" the Queen broke in, her voice strident with emotion.

The King raised his hand imperiously. "Let me acquaint Leonardo with the facts. Today we had a fine demonstration of marching formations done by special troops from the Netherlands, from Spain, and from Scotland."

"Is it not the Scottish warriors who wear the skirts?" Leonardo asked curiously.

"Kilts, Monsieur," corrected the minister Blanchard, cracking his knuckles.

"Kilts and tartans," said Francis, "a brilliant uniform of red and green and yellow which, I should imagine, would make these barbarians easy to shoot at."

"These and other colors are set in squares and stripes, Monsieur—a distinctive pattern which differs from clan to clan, from terrain to terrain," said Blanchard.

"Blanchard knows more about it than I do," said the King tolerantly. "He went to Scotland to make the arrangements for their coming."

"Monsieur Laurier is dead," chanted the Queen.

The King looked annoyed. "What happened," he said, "was that when the exhibition closed with the Scottish clan parading and playing their weird instruments—"

"Bagpipes," said the minister.

"Then the Queen and I and the others here left the field and returned to the castle. We had just descended from the coach when word came that Philip had been killed upon the field, and we returned here at once."

"Tell him how he died," said the Queen.

A look passed between Francis and his wife—hers of acute suspicion, his of impenetrable aloofness.

"Come, Leonardo—and all of you," said the King deliberately, rising and leading the way towards the amphitheatre. "You must see how it was."

Leonardo saw how Marigny, his former coach companion, walked close beside the Queen, who paid no attention to him; she appeared to be sleepwalking. Then the King gave a quick sign to Marigny, and the latter came at once to his sire's side, like a hound trained to heel.

"Philip is—was—a promising young nobleman from the south," the King continued as they walked. "He went far in the last year, since he came to court. It was his office

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at these outdoor affairs to represent the King's power at the close, after all the spectators had gone. He would approach the center of the field, blow a trumpet as a signal to the guards mounted along the hills, and remain in possession of the field until the soldiers had closed formation and retired."

The King and Leonardo, followed by the others, passed through a pair of marble portals into a wide corridor cut from the hills, and entered a dell, the floor of which was covered with thick, springy turf. Elliptical in shape, with only the one entrance, the vale was perhaps two hundred feet long, and fifty at the widest point, close to the mid-section. From the arena's level floor the sides sloped gently upwards, the reddish earth neatly landscaped with low-lying shrubs—Contoneasters, pyrecanthus—no one of them high enough to conceal a man. Creepers partially covered the ground, and flat round stones were laid here and there so that one might mount to the hill top without stepping upon the earth.

At a glance Leonardo could see that no one but himself and the royal party were within the amphitheatre—they, and the figure lying motionless upon the greensward close to the center of the field. At the sight of the inert body the Queen gave a cry of dismay.

"It was your order, my dear, that he should remain there," the King said.

"Let me speak now—"

"In a moment, my dear! Let us tarry here. Today, after almost everyone had left, Laurier approached the center of the field. The guards all had their backs to the arena, as is a fixed rule, so they did not see anything. The last three people to leave the arena were Count and Countess Angerville and their daughter."

The King turned to a distinguished-looking middle-aged couple and a beautiful blonde girl.

"Tell them what you saw, Angerville," the King said.

"I turned first," Angerville said in a firm, resolute tone. "Philip had just started to raise the trumpet to his lips. We walked on for several seconds and were just about *here,* and then when no sound came, I looked back, my wife and daughter looking back too. Philip seemed to stagger forward—away from us—dropping his trumpet. He turned slightly and we caught the glint of the knife-hilt as he fell. The knife could not have been thrown from the hill top by any of the guardsmen!"

"They are too distant," the King said, "and the angle is too oblique for accuracy. The knife could only have been thrown by someone standing at the level of the arena floor!"

"But how could that be?" cried the girl with the blonde hair.

Angerville took his daughter's hand in his. "It is impossible—and

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yet it happened," he said simply. "My wife and I and our daughter looked all about the arena from where we stood. There is no place of concealment. See there? Even the tiers of marble benches are set flush in the hillside and offer no hiding place. I swear it, *there was nobody within the arena but ourselves!*"

"But you did not mind that Laurier was killed, did you, Angerville?" said the Queen bitterly.

Angerville paled and the King raised his hand, but he could hold the Queen in check no longer.

"You knew your daughter was in love with Monsieur Laurier, and you were afraid they might marry!" the Queen went on. "Oh, the entire court knew about it."

"Your Majesty—" Angerville protested.

"Oh, I don't say you did it, Angerville. You wouldn't have dared. But I cannot stand your hypocritical *concern—*"

She turned and faced Leonardo, her dark beauty wild with passion.

"Monsieur da Vinci—".

"Careful now, my dear," Francis said resignedly. "Leonardo might take offense at your words and return to Italy, and we should be the poorer for it."

The Queen's lips curled in scorn. "Always Francis says to me, until I am weary: 'No other man has ever been born who knows as much as Leonardo da Vinci. Artist, inventor, engineer, mathematician, musician, philosopher — all these and more. He sees everything, he knows everything.' Well, Monsieur, I have not been willing to share my husband's views. I spent my girlhood in Valladolid, where Italian accomplishment is not held in too high regard. I cannot help my feelings."

Leonardo tilted his head in quick sympathy, tinged with satire.

"A friend — of ours — lies dead there." The Queen closed her eyes. "So far as we can see, no one was at his side nor anywhere around to kill him—yet he was stabbed. His Majesty and I shall remain outside the arena until the sun sets. That is in perhaps a little over an hour. We shall answer willingly any and all questions you may ask. If in that time 'the greatest mind in all Europe' can discover who killed Monsieur Laurier, I shall be ready to agree with my husband's opinion of da Vinci's skill!"

In the moment of intense silence that followed the Queen's ourburst, Leonardo was aware of the long shadows of the late afternoon, of a cloud of midges, and of the lazy flapping of the festive banners. An hysterical woman had flung down a challenge which the others were waiting to see if he would accept. He needn't accept, of course; he could go back to his peaceful garden and sketch golden orioles, but not for long. A frustrated Queen would leave her husband no peace, and Leonardo felt a return to Flor-

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ence now would be an anticlimax to his life.

"Very well, your Highness," he said finally. "I prefer death to lassitude. And I never tire of serving others."

He turned then, and with the minister Blanchard at his heels walked towards the silent figure in the center of the field...

Before his death, three years later, Leonardo da Vinci told Francis how and why he set out to work as he did that fateful afternoon.

"When I was a boy in Vinci," the Italian master said, "my closest village playmates told me that a mark made upon the trunk of a tree grew higher from the ground with each year's growth of that tree. First I made sure they *believed* what they said; if they were lying, it would be needless to investigate. When I soon found that even the adults of the village believed this true, I went into the woods, notched a healthy young tree with a fleur de lis, and measured it from the ground. I returned each year for three years and measured again, and found that what everyone said was *not* true. A mark upon the trunk of a tree remains at the same height for the life of the tree, because a tree grows vertically from the crown, while its trunk increases only in girth!"...

First, then, that afternoon, Leonardo called Countess Angerville and her daughter to him.

"Are you as certain as your husband, Madam, that there was no one within the arena at the time Laurier was killed?"

"Yes, Monsieur," the woman said without hesitation, and her grey eyes were honest and steadfast.

"And you, Mademoiselle?"

The girl nodded, though seemed under a spell.

"What did you do when you saw Laurier fall to the ground?" he asked the Countess.

"My husband ran forward to look at him, warning us to stay where we were. Then he ran back and told us to follow him, so that we might tell the others what had happened."

"He forgot the soldiers who stood circling the tops of the hills?"

"I suppose he did, Monsieur."

"Then all three of you ran out of the arena leaving Laurier upon the ground."

"Yes."

Leonardo turned to the girl. "Is it true, Mademoiselle, as the Queen suggests, that you and Monsieur Laurier wished to marry?"

"No, no!" she seemed to come suddenly alive. "I—I loved him, yes, but—he did not wish to marry me. I know this because there was someone else—"

Her mother laid a warning hand upon the girl's arm, and she fell silent. Leonardo did not press the question. He could guess who her rival was.

"Would it be possible," Leonardo addressed both the mother and the

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girl, "that Laurier might have conceived this as a way of dramatically committing suicide?"

"No, no," the Countess assured him vehemently. "Philip was ambitious, alive to his very fingertips. The whole world was before him."

Leonardo examined the sprawled body before he had it removed from the field, and withdrew the knife from Laurier's chest, where it had been embedded to the dudgeon. It was a plain hunting knife, razor sharp, with a yellow bone handle.

The Italian then had minister Blanchard order the soldiers to bring a thick plank into the arena and set it upright—in the exact spot Laurier had occupied. The soldiers obeyed with alacrity.

"Now who is proficient in the art of hurling the knife?" Leonardo asked Blanchard.

"I am," the minister announced quietly. Leonardo was surprised: such a skill appeared at odds with the man's self-effacement.

"And anyone else in the party?"

"It is a common skill here in France," the minister said, shrugging. "Baron de Marigny is my equal, and even the barbarian, Bruce Stewart, the leader of the Scottish troops, has vied successfully with us."

"Ask those two to come here at once," Leonardo said.

Marigny arrived with a gloomy countenance and stood sulkily by as they waited for Stewart, who at last marched vigorously into the arena, resplendent in his brilliant tartan.

"Ach, mon, the laddies tell me you want me to throw the knife," Stewart said, smiling. He was a ruddy-faced Scot with heavy jaws and craggy brows, and he looked as if all of life was a laughing matter. "I'd be muckle pleased to know my competitor."

Leonardo stationed Marigny on the floor of the arena, about fifteen paces from the board, Blanchard halfway up the east side, cautioning him to stand only upon the flat stones amid the creepers; he placed Stewart at the top of the hill, between two guards, whose discipline apparently was so stern that not one had turned to look at the proceedings below. And they had been standing there all afternoon.

Leonardo used the bone-handled hunting knife in the test. Marigny threw first and embedded the knife so deeply in the board that it took two soldiers to pull it out. But first Leonardo studied the angle of the penetration. Blanchard threw second and again Leonardo studied the angle. Stewart made four tries, missing the board altogether thrice, and succeeding only on his fourth try.

"The sun was in my eyes," said the Scot, his face almost as red as his tartan.

"But it was not only the sun," Leonardo told Francis. "It was the distance which made it unfeasible, too, and I consoled him. You were

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right, your Highness. The murderer had stood on a level with his victim or slightly above—not as high as I placed Blanchard—for the blade had entered Laurier's chest at only a slight angle, and not acute as it would have been if the knife had been thrown from higher up."

So now Leonardo knew that in spite of three witnesses who claimed the arena was empty, *the murderer was there all the time!* But where?

He had a hint of the truth, but only a hint, and his time was now half used up. He had Blanchard order six soldiers to search carefully the west side of the arena for sign of footprints, for he knew the murderer would not handicap his aim by permitting the sun to shine in his eyes. In the meantime, while the soldiers searched, he detained Stewart and spoke with him.

"When you left the field with your detachment, Monsieur Stewart," he said, "you returned at once to the castle?"

"Aye, marching all the way and cutting tricks. The laddies were in fine form."

"And was any man absent from your group?"

"Not a one. All sixteen of them, acting as one man!" he said proudly.

Leonardo sat down upon one of the marble benches and sighed. Momentarily he wished he were back in his garden making one of his numerous sketches of the golden oriole. Why should the oriole keep coming into his mind? Da Vinci listened a moment to the silence of his unconscious, for which he had a great reverence, and then said:

"Tell me, Monsieur Stewart, have you enjoyed your sojourn in France?"

"I have, aye. But many of the laddies are homesick and will be glad to leave. It's the country here, you know. Most of Scotland is very bleak and rocky, but there are parts of Appin, where we Stewarts roam, which are like this earth here—gentle and wooded and covered with brush. It reminds the laddies of home."

"Footprints, footprints!" one of the soldiers cried from a quarter way up the western side.

Leonardo hastened up to him and saw two fresh imprints of a shoe beside a stepping stone, both of the right foot. Doubtless someone—the murderer?—had missed his footing, perhaps in the excitement of a quick escape.

The soldiers found no other print on the entire western slope.

"At once," Leonardo cried to Blanchard, "get those guards down from the hill—those five!" He pointed to the men who guarded the major portion of the western side. "Monsieur Stewart, would you accompany him, please?"

The Scotsman nodded willingly and set off climbing beside the King's minister. Halfway up, the minister sat down and rested, and instantly Leonardo took a small drawing pad and crayon from his

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cloak and in a few deft lines portrayed Blanchard seated, clearly indicating his dejection and fatigue.

"Why do you draw only Blanchard?" Baron de Marigny said querulously, looking over Leonardo's shoulder.

"I draw what I see," the artist replied, putting his pad quickly away and swinging around to face the Baron. "Where were you when this tragedy occurred?"

"I was at the castle," said Marigny, scowling. "I was not feeling well, and I stayed the afternoon in my chamber."

"And yet when the Queen reached the castle on her return from the day's event, she sent you to fetch me, knowing you were ill?"

"I was feeling better. I met them as they arrived, and when her Majesty received the news of Laurier's death—"

"And what was his Majesty's reaction?"

"He didn't want her to send for you. I told you." Marigny's face grew suffused with anger. "But she was insistent."

The five guardsmen from the hill watch arrived now and lined up for Leonardo's interrogation. Time was growing short. The sun had dipped behind the western hill and the arena lay in blue shadow. One by one Leonardo took a guardsman aside and said, conspiratorially:

"You and I know who slipped by you twice over the hill, don't we, Monsieur?"

Out of five poker faces it was Leonardo's good fortune to find one which mirrored every thought process. The guard denied joint knowledge with Leonardo, of course, but at least the Italian now knew that if one were lying, so in all probability were the other four.

Leonardo was now sure of the solution to the mystery — so sure that he walked out of the arena, the minister Blanchard and Stewart trailing behind him. Marigny remained where he was.

At his Majesty's pavilion the Queen called out, "Your time is about up, da Vinci!"

Many in the group eyed him with suspicion and hostility. Leonardo bowed and said, "One moment, your Highness." He turned to Count Angerville who stood surveying him calmly from beside the King.

"Where were you seated during the performance?" he asked.

Angerville looked taken aback. "Why, beside his Majesty, on his left."

Francis nodded, frowning. "Angerville was on my left, and Blanchard on my right."

"And did his Majesty speak with you during the presentation?"

Angerville appeared to think hard for a moment. "Only once, I believe."

"And what did he say?"

"Come, come, Leonardo," the King said testily. "Where is this leading us?"

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"Perhaps to the truth, your Highness. What did his Majesty say to you, Count Angerville?"

"He said—" Angerville colored, and looked abashed at the women present. "His Majesty asked me if I thought the Scotsmen wore anything *under* their skirts!"

There was a ripple of laughter in the party, and some of the tenseness and hostility relaxed. Only the King glared fiercely at Leonardo.

"Are you trying to make sport of me?" he demanded.

"God forbid, your Highness," Leonardo said humbly. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the Queen fidgeting, preparing to quell his questions.

"And where, your Highness," he said, addressing the Queen, "were you sitting?"

"On a bench on the opposite side of the field, where the women always sit!"

And then to the surprise of the entire party Leonardo da Vinci sank down on one knee, bowed his head, and said:

"I confess I do not deserve a higher evaluation in her Majesty's eyes than I already possess. I have failed to discover how Monsieur Laurier was murdered by an invisible assassin. Moreover, were I given a year, or two years, I do not believe I could solve this mystery. In extenuation, I will say that I am an old man and perhaps my powers of observation have waned. I beg now to be excused."

After a moment the Queen nodded. Leonardo rose, and while the King and his party watched in frozen silence, he walked slowly, almost falteringly, to the coach that had brought him.

But Leonardo da Vinci, in addition to his other accomplishments, was also a fine actor.

Next morning he was sitting in his garden as usual, calmly and confidently making another sketch of the golden oriole when Jacques announced the arrival of the King.

Francis waved Leonardo back to his chair, then sat down on a bench beside him.

"Leonardo," he said at once, "I wish to thank you for what you did for me yesterday. I shall not soon forget it. Now do not pretend further with me. You know who murdered Laurier, and how the miracle was accomplished."

Leonardo said nothing, but watched the King steadily, as if he awaited further word.

"There are times," the monarch said, lowering his eyes, "when it is politically expedient to remove a dangerous subject. Your own countryman Machiavelli has said this. Laurier was a traitor, bargaining in secrets with a foreign power."

Leonardo nodded, knowing the real reason why Laurier had died; the Queen had made that plain for all to see. The King's subterfuge was pathetic, but Leonardo's acceptance of it made it possible for the

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two men to talk freely about the crime.

"Tell me now what you know, Leonardo."

"I know you had him killed, Sire. When I realized the man whom you chose to commit the murder both entered and escaped from the arena with the complicity of the guardsmen, I knew they had their orders *only from you*. If the cause of the murder had been a simple, spontaneous grudge, and committed, say, by one of the Scottish soldiers or by Stewart himself, there could have been no such collusion."

Francis nodded approvingly. "And you know the man whom I picked?"

"The men," Leonardo corrected gravely. "One to commit the deed, the other to replace him by your side. When I learned that you asked Angerville a question about the Scottish dress, I knew the man on the *other* side of you was not Blanchard. Blanchard, who had been to Scotland, was familiar with all these details, and if he'd been at your other side you'd have directed your question to him. Therefore, the man on the other side of you was someone who superficially resembled Blanchard—Baron de Marigny who looks so much like Blanchard that I mistook him for the minister when he came here to fetch me yesterday. It must have been a shock to him when I addressed him thus. He took pains to make himself up to resemble Blanchard even more, in order to deceive her Majesty, who sat facing you on the other side of the field."

"Ah, yes," the King said quickly. "Her Majesty liked Laurier—I did not wish to hurt her."

"Of course. And now as to how it was done—"

"I thought my plan would amaze and perplex!" cried the King. "And yet you perceived the truth. You must tell me your methods."

Leonardo pointed towards the aviary.

"By the help of the golden oriole, there, who started a train of thought. I mentioned to Marigny yesterday how the oriole was hard to sketch in his natural habitat, which is among the green and yellow of the woods. His plumage blends into the background of sun-shot leaves in a protective coloration, making him virtually invisible. It is the same with the uniforms of soldiers, which are designed in many cases to help throw a cloak of invisibility about the soldier. It is common knowledge. The brilliant tartan of the Scottish warrior does this, paradoxically. The terrain within the arena, with its red earth and green shrubbery is much like the country of Appin, where the Stewarts live and fight. Stewart himself told me this. And when he climbed up the slope on the shadowed side of the arena with Blanchard, and they rested a moment, I was moved to make a quick sketch of Blanchard, partly *because Blanchard was all I*

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saw. He appeared to be sitting alone, unless one focused one's eyes especially to detect Stewart beside him . . . Curiously, was it not Blanchard who suggested to you this means of achieving invisibility?"

The King nodded.

"As I reconstructed it," Leonardo went on, "Laurier stood in the center of the field, waiting for the last spectator to leave. He must have seen Blanchard come over the hill and wondered at it. Perhaps it delayed his putting the trumpet to his lips. Blanchard threw the knife at the defenseless soldier, and when the Angervilles turned and saw Laurier clutching his throat, Blanchard must have already crouched upon the side of the hill, with a borrowed tartan concealing him. The sun was still up, and his was the shadowed part of the hill, so he must have been virtually invisible. Then when the Angervilles ran from the arena to fetch help, Blanchard completed his escape."

Suddenly Francis seemed to lose interest.

"Thank you, thank you, Leonardo, you have explained it all with wondrous accuracy. And now I must go—I am needed at Amboise. I shall visit you again shortly."

The King was hastening across the sunny garden when Leonardo stopped him with a final question.

"And what about Monsieur Blanchard? He is to be rewarded for his pains?"

The King whirled around, open-mouthed. Then, as a look of faint concern appeared, he shrugged.

"Poor man, Blanchard," he said. "Her Majesty must have learned he did it, too. They found him by the castle pond this morning, with a hunting knife in his chest. A pity, too, for it was a fine reward I promised him!"

And with that the King disappeared behind a hedgerow, and Leonardo da Vinci, citizen of the world, contemporary of Machiavelli, sat peacefully down to his sketching the elusive golden oriole, almost invisible in the sun-brilliant foliage.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARY MONTGOMERY**

TITLE: ***Happy Birthday***

TYPE: Suspense – with Crime and Detection

LOCALE: Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *For a "first story"—unusual obliqueness of style . . . but in the end there are no loose ends. A rewarding experience.*

THEY BOTH KNEW SHE WAS DEAD. Rausch, the detective to whom she'd rented their third floor, had taken time to put on only his trousers and shoes. He'd rushed down still wearing his pajama top. A leprous creation of yellow and purple blobs. The detective rose from his crouched position beside the body and said bitterly, "Look at you—"

Sure, Pete thought, look and be damned. That's what Ingrid had done—looked and been damned.

But Rausch went on nervously, complainingly, one hand worrying an unshaven chin which bristled in a two-tone black and white. "—a well-off young fellow with a pretty girl to look after you, and you had to go after her with a knife!"

Pete stared in some surprise at the kitchen knife he still held. He carefully placed the long sharp blade on his bureau, reaching over the body of Ingrid to do so. There was blood all down the front of his sister-in-law's dress. The golden Viking fallen in battle—the Battle of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Oddly, he felt drained of emotion. And in his head one apt quotation swirled round and round: "Come, where my love lies bleeding . . ."

No, no, "lies *dreaming*". That's how it went. Often, no doubt, he had heard his mother play that Stephen Foster song; but he remembered it from Caresse's singing it to him as he lay with his head

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in her lap. Caresse, whom he hadn't so much as thought of all this past year until today. Caresse with her thin, droopy figure—the low, loose breasts that made her look sluttish...

"Why did you want to kill her?" Rausch demanded, as if an injury had been done *him*. The hand strayed to shield his eyes from the sun streaming in through a window.

"Ingrid?" Pete roused himself to exclaim wonderingly, "I *loved* that girl!"

Loved, in the past tense.

Is there—he puzzled—a particular moment at which one stops loving? That was like the desperate question he'd asked Ingrid when, in the new black costume of her widowhood, she'd come to see him at the hospital... *Ingrid, at what point does a man cease to be a man? I mean, if he loses a toe he's still a man—right? And if he loses...* But she wouldn't let him continue so that he could prove to her he wasn't still Pete Harper. She had said not to be morbid. She had said, *Just be glad you're alive instead of killed outright in the smash-up like Allen.* And she'd said, *At least, you'll have money. Even though the accident was your brother's fault, he was insured against injury resulting to any passenger in his car...* But she'd dropped that line of talk when she saw how little it interested him, and cried, *Pete! Pete! we're in this together—you're all the family I have now.* Then she kissed him on the lips, which she had never done before.

So he had determined to live because he worshipped her and she needed him. And after Ingrid left, before the opiate put him to sleep, he had figured how to invest what she'd get and what he'd saved, so he could support her. But, it seemed, she had plans, too. When he came home she told him, so proudly, so prettily, that she had rented part of the house. The house that was theirs jointly, since she'd inherited Allen's share of the old frame dwelling.

"Well, what the devil got into you?" the plain-clothesman was asking, lighting a cigarette with a hand that trembled.

Pete shook his head, regarding the other with brown eyes which usually had a smile in them but now were as unreadable as muddy pools. Things had turned out bad enough. Why degrade himself by baring to Rausch the infamy of Ingrid?

And yet, he pondered, what little circumstances could spell the difference between living and dying! For if this hadn't been his birthday Ingrid would still be alive...

This recalled the birthday card which had led to his discovery of Ingrid's secret and made him unhappily aware that Caresse—who had sent the card—was by now on her way to visit him. She'd be walking into this mess!

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"Let's get going, Herman," Pete urged.

"You wait here," the detective said, "until I make a phone call and get dressed." Rausch went into the hall. One of his shoes squeaked.

I've got to make it upstairs again, Pete thought, and get rid of those things in Ingrid's room. But he was tired in body and spirit. He seated himself on the ottoman and glanced at his watch. Was it only twelve thirty? I've got to get upstairs...

This morning, this awful morning now past, had begun like so many others since he had gone into business for himself. He had shuttled back and forth between the bathroom (which had been installed for his use where the pantry used to be) and this room of his (formerly a music room). When he had made himself clean-shaven and neat, and still Ingrid hadn't appeared, he set the table for them in the breakfast nook. He was putting water on to boil for the powdered coffee they used, when she entered the kitchen.

"What," she had chided him, smiling, "do you think *you're* doing?" Her face was faintly flushed, like a sleepy child's; but the deep-set eyes were clear. She came fastening a pale-pink kimono about her and tossing back her fair, tumbled hair.

She had almost no eyebrows in the morning. He liked her best so, without make-up; she needed none.

"Doing?" he laughed. "I'm tiptoeing, so I won't wake my Dream Girl."

"This is my department," she said, ignoring the word he'd tried to be funny with. That meant she still pitied him—the word made her uneasy. "Sorry I overslept. Wait, Pete, let me do that." She whisked around him, touching him lightly on the shoulder in passing, and opened the refrigerator. She took out the orange juice, the eggs.

He felt useless, letting her do everything. He stood idly, hands in his pockets. "You and your economies!" he snorted. "Why don't you have the maid come mornings, too?"

"I wouldn't want her in my way. Anyhow, I love to fix your breakfast. Now sit down and eat."

"Why do you love to fix my breakfast?" he asked softly, still feeling that quick, butterfly touch on his shoulder.

But she wouldn't say what he wanted to hear. Instead, she changed the subject. "I have a confession to make, Pete. Do you remember those poems of Allen's? His best ones, which he put in a folder and gave me that last Christmas because we didn't have money for presents? Well, I sent one to a magazine. This particular magazine pays a dollar a line for poetry—"

"That's more than he was making as a cub reporter."

"I know. The undergraduate who was voted The Man Most Likely To Succeed!"

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"Oh, Allen would have made a name for himself eventually," Pete said. "I always thought that if he ever get around to finishing one of those short stories he started—"

"Well, don't you think I should *try* to sell the poems? A dollar a line . . ." Ingrid pouted.

"I guess that's up to you, isn't it? They're your property. Say, did you ever come across a short story he was writing about a policeman who lost his life saving some young punk?"

"He never wrote anything like that, Pete."

"He was working on it before he died. Not a bad plot, either, the way he told it to me. And it really had happened. He got the idea from some drunk in Malloy's, who happened to know that this rookie patrolman wasn't a hero at all. No names mentioned by the informant, you understand — he wasn't *that* drunk. But being a newspaperman, Allen nosed around until he found out what year that shack had burned down and who was the cop on the beat."

"Who was it?" Ingrid measured out their coffee.

"I didn't ask. Allen used fictitious names, of course. But the facts were, the place had caught fire because the cop and this boy were a couple of queers—"

"Disgusting!" Ingrid said, with a hauteur that tilted her charming head slightly backward. "Oh, Pete, I just remembered something. The vacuum cleaner wouldn't draw yesterday. Do you think you could take a look before you go?"

"Will do," he said, hating himself for having offended her. It was then that the thought of Caresse had first stirred his memory: for Caresse wouldn't have been prudish. Caresse hadn't Ingrid's refinement.

His sister-in-law was upstairs, running the water for her bath, by the time he had the vacuum cleaner working again. And Rausch had returned, looking beat after the night shift, and gone up to his third-floor suite. And Pete had slipped into his pocket the revolver he always kept handy in the store, and had let himself out of the house . . .

Yes, it had started much like any other day: noticing every gesture of hers, every word she spoke, loving every scrap of her, even the occasional impatience in her voice. Except that he was later than usual.

But then a funny thing happened when he'd reached the corner. He had bought a paper and was facing the street as he pocketed his change. A woman emerged from the subway exit—a spry though elderly woman. He met her gaze, and was turning to stomp away when she called to him, "Mr. Harper!"

Waiting, he studied her as she came closer. She had a good-humored crisscross of wrinkles that seamed her face like a cheerful patchwork quilt. She was a complete stranger to him.

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"I recognized you from your picture," she said shyly. "I'm Mrs. Pomeroy."

"Oh?" he said, still baffled.

"From Riverdale?" she prompted.

It failed to give him a clue.

So she had gone on in a rush of embarrassment. "It's a long trip for me, but I'm going to my sister's. She's had sciatica — well, anyhow, bumping into you like this right after I'd—you know? Well, I just thought I'd like to tell you that I'm one of—one of your well-wishers." She stuck out her hand.

"Thank you," Pete had said, shaking hands with her.

Screwball! he thought to himself as she scurried away. He continued toward the liquor store. But it puzzled him how she'd known his name.

"Hey, Pete, wait up!"

He had been passing Malloy's Bar and Grill, where Allen heard the story that had disgusted Ingrid; where Allen had tied one on the night he'd wrecked the car. When Pete turned, he saw it was Frenchie. He and Frenchie had gone to grammar school together. Pete had got to college, later to become buyer for the sporting-goods department of a New York store. Frenchie had wound up delivering the mail for Uncle Sam.

"Hey," Frenchie had said, coming up, "happy birthday!"

"Gosh!" Pete had marveled. "Is this April the—? Well, what do you know! How'd you remember?"

"I didn't," Frenchie said, pushing back his cap. "But I got eyes, and I learned to read the same time as you. I just left a birthday card at your house."

"Are they sending them in transparent envelopes now?"

"No," Frenchie had explained seriously, "but on this envelope is drawn in ink two little dolls, like. A boy one, and a girl. And the buttons on the boy's coat spell *HAPPY*, and the bottom of the girl's skirt spells *BIRTHDAY*. See?"

Caresse! he had guessed. She always used to doodle little sketches while she sat at the switchboard. She had shown him some of her idle drawings one day, after she learned that painting was his hobby. Then he'd bought her a paint box, not expecting her ever to use it.

Frenchie, dangling an empty pouch, added, "Say, it's a funny thing how much mail your brother began getting after he was dead. Twenty letters a day, at *least* twenty."

"What are you giving me?" Pete scoffed.

"You mean, his wife never shows 'em to you?"

"Oh, cut it, Frenchie. Who'd be writing to Allen now?"

"That's what I just been saying. "Who? All them letters!"

Pete laughed. "You're cracking, fella."

Frenchie muttered something uncomplimentary and walked on.

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Pete had watched the mailman's slightly bowed, uniformed legs trudge up the street. Why would anyone make up a damfool yarn like that? Then it had struck him: perhaps Ingrid had sent out more than the one poem of Allen's she'd mentioned. But in that case why hadn't she mentioned the others?

He had found Ray alone in the liquor store.

"Happy birthday!" Pete had greeted Ray.

"Whose?" his partner asked.

"Mine."

"Oh. Congrats, kiddo. How old?"

"Twenty-eight, what's left of me."

"Nuts! You never looked better."

Pete raised a cynical eyebrow.

"I mean it," Ray said. "You're a good-looking son-of-a-gun. You got class, too—you know?"

Ray was a good guy. His face was shaped like a dishpan, and a broken nose contributed to the scooped-out, elliptical effect. He had been one of Malloy's bartenders until he won on a Sweepstakes ticket—about the same time Allen's insurance company had paid Pete for the irreparable loss. And Pop Weaver, who alternated the working hours with Ray, had turned his back on three years of retirement to buy in with them. They were two good guys, his partners. In one way or another they understood a lot about life.

"Listen," Ray had said, "you ought to celebrate. Don't hang around here. Take a bottle home and get loaded. Do you good for once."

"Then, why don't you do it sometime?" Pete had grinned.

"Me, I seen too much. Know what I mean? But there's other ways to celebrate. Get a woman."

"*Me?*" Pete had stopped grinning.

"You gotta stop looking down on yourself, kid, then maybe you'll realize nobody else looks down on you, neither. Listen, Pete, that's what women are for—so's a man can remember he's a man. Know what I mean?"

"What woman would want half a man?"

"Now, now, none of that! Listen, bud, I know you're carrying a torch for Ingrid. It's a waste of time. I went with one of them cold-blooded blonde dames once. All they want is money. They'll work a man to death, and after he's gone and they've got it salted away they start kicking up their high heels."

"Ingrid's not like that, Ray," Pete said. "Anyway, they were very superior people, her family. No money, but background."

"You got background, too. And backbone. You're supporting her, ain't you?"

"Look, Allen didn't leave anything. Besides, she gets breakfast for me every day and does the marketing."

"Big deal! College graduate, ain't she?"

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"Yes. That's where Allen met her, at college."

"Sure, a smart dame. Maybe too smart, Pete." But then a customer had come in, and Ray said, "You go on home and enjoy yourself, Pete. And don't come back tonight either."

"I'll see." He could, of course, do as he chose. There was that advantage in having your money work for you. He liked to keep busy, though—take care of the books and the reordering, listen to the customers if they wanted to talk about their troubles or politics or baseball.

"Still, he had decided to take Ray's advice about going home. And he was grateful to Ray for trying to bolster his self-esteem. Ray could be right. *If you don't like yourself, who the hell else is going to like you? If you don't think you're good enough for Ingrid, how can you get across to her the idea that you are?*

Suddenly he felt wonderful—a little scared but wonderful, because suddenly he knew that he was going to ask Ingrid to marry him.

Presently he had reached the house, the white frame house his father had left to him and Allen. Once it had been in a fashionable neighborhood. It still sounded good to say you lived in the Bay Ridge section; but this particular neighborhood had about as much elegance now as a used-car lot. And the old place bore the added indignity of a wooden sign on its porch newel. Ingrid's sign: *ROOMS*. She'd had it nailed there while he was in the hospital. She had done it without consulting him, telling him only after Rausch (their sole tenant, thank goodness!) was already installed. Well, if she liked to feel she was earning something of her own above what he gave her, and if the work wasn't too much for her (though how could it be, with him paying for a maid?) ——a lot he cared if she plastered the whole front with signs!

Pete had hoisted himself up the steps and, whistling, let himself in.

She wasn't home. That took some of the steam out of him. He'd wanted to ask her right away, before he had time for misgivings.

He had gone to his ground-floor bedroom, removed the gun from his pocket, studied her portrait on his easel. It wasn't his first canvas of her. The first, for which she had posed, she'd taken upstairs. This he had done from memory, though, and it was Ingrid as he saw her at breakfast—with the softness of sleep still on her, hair disheveled, without eyebrows. He liked it better but he knew she wouldn't . . .

Where had she put his card from Caresse? There was no envelope on his desk. That was another letdown. First no Ingrid; now no card from Caresse. Ingrid must have taken it to the second floor and, not expecting him back till later, left it there.

He had decided, perversely, that

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he must read his birthday card at once. Actually, he hadn't been upstairs since the accident, and his decision was dictated more by the challenge of the ascent than by the contents of the envelope.

Peter went to the foot of the stairs, put his hand on the rail. Looking upward, he sighed. *I'll never make it . . .* Anyway, it would wear him out. Always supposing he was lucky enough not to break his neck . . .

Yet he was in no mood for defeat. After a moment, since there was no one to see, he adopted the infantile procedure of going up backwards propelling his weight by his palms, sitting his way to the top. When he was halfway up he stopped, realizing that getting down again was going to be the real problem. If he were to try sitting his way down, his legs would overreach the steps. He would see himself sawing for a footing, toppling forward, going headfirst, helplessly, down, down, down. The pain would be more endurable than the humiliation . . . Suddenly he remembered how he and Allen used to make the descent when they were youngsters—that rapid transit, guaranteed to put a shine on the seat of the pants! Pete grinned, his problem solved, and continued to the second-floor landing.

Ingrid's room was the one that had been his parents'. But as he looked around at *her* books, *her* frilly pillows and drapes, *her* silver dressing set, and the wonderful array of lipsticks and perfumes, he felt like an interloper. Then he caught sight of himself in the long cheval glass, and elation died. *I look like Toulouse-Lautrec . . .* He had been an idiot to let himself imagine Ingrid would want any part of him.

Caresse's card stood in full view on Ingrid's bedside table, propped against the telephone.

As Frenchie had observed, Caresse had decorated the envelope with a pen sketch in the upper left-hand corner. Pete smiled over the cartoon, two "stick-men" such as a child might have drawn. Then he tore the envelope open and drew out the card. Its front page bore the printing, *HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAVE ONE ON ME . . .* Inside, under the sprawled figure of a Raggedy Ann doll extending a foaming mug of beer, the caption was continued, *'CAUSE I'M A PUSHOVER FOR YOU.* She had added in her own hand,

"Remember me?

Caresse."

It meant more to him than he'd thought it could. Someone had saved a memory of what he had been, and kept him intact in her memory. How kind of her! Although, if Caresse knew what he was now, would she have got in touch with him? *Did* she know . . . ?

He seated himself on the edge of Ingrid's bed, the card in his hand, remembering. They had both taken

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shelter under an awning in midtown, ducking the rain . . .

"Some surprise, this weather, isn't it, Mr. Harper?"

He had turned to see who knew him by name. She was wearing a dress of beige silk and raindrops. A single droplet coursed down the bridge of her nose; the paper bag in her arms was soggy. Who was she? He knew the face . . .

"I'm Caresse Jones, the night switchboard operator at the Sanford."

Of course, the thin girl with the shoulder-length black hair. When he came in after a round of night-clubbing and asked the clerk for his key, sometimes she would be lounging behind the desk. It was a small hotel and phone calls after midnight were infrequent.

He had rented his room at the Sanford on a monthly basis, although he seldom used it more than twice a week. Being a buyer meant occasional late hours on the social end of the job, and he had found this inexpensive Times Square hotel a convenience.

"Caresse Jones," he repeated, and had immediately sneezed.

"You could stand a cup of hot coffee," she said, looking concerned.

"I don't see any coming down," he laughed.

She giggled. She would offer him some, she had said, if they had met two blocks west. Her place was two long blocks over; he'd only get wetter going there.

He remembered thinking, *It's just after five. I don't have to get into my tux until eight. Plenty of time to grab a cab and drop her off before going to the hotel . . .*

Afterward, he had wondered what possessed him to go up to her apartment. She wasn't glamorous, or brainy, or irresistibly witty. She wasn't even pretty. She had a wide mouth that quirked in one corner with juvenile toughness. Yet, in the taxi . . . Was it because her dress had clung so wetly about her body?

Her apartment looked out on an alley made drearier by the downpour. The place was musty and chilly. But she had dug a small electric heater from the recesses of her closet and plugged it in to dry his feet. She lit the oven in the tiny kitchenette and hung his coat in front of that. She brought him whiskey, saying it was quicker than coffee. He drank it while she went into the bathroom to change.

She had reappeared in a housedress, a thoroughly modest wrap-around which tied at the waist. Nevertheless, he had been conscious of the loose, thick hair and the loose, thin breasts.

"Now I'll make that coffee, Mr. Harper," she said, still tying her sash.

And he had risen and taken her in his arms and undone the sash . . .

There was no talk of love, ever. She made it easy for him from the first. When he passed through the lobby of the Sanford she gave no

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sign of their relationship. When he wanted to see her he rang her apartment, or the hotel switchboard. Could she see him? She always could.

Sometimes he brought groceries with him—thick steaks, small delicacies not on the usual market list, a bottle of wine. Sometimes nylons, or perfume, or a handbag. She was always so pleased . . .

After he had met Ingrid (when Allen became engaged to her) Pete was grateful that Caresse had made it possible to keep matters so uncomplicated. He told her about Allen's fiancée, describing that fair head, those deep-set blue, blue eyes . . .

"You're in love with her," Caresse had remarked quietly.

He had denied it hotly, and they had quarreled. He had dropped her abruptly . . .

I ought to phone and thank Caresse for the card. Pete looked at his watch.

She'd still be asleep. But when had Caresse ever minded what time he called?

"It's Pete," he said in a casual manner. "Thanks for the card, Caresse. Did I wake you?"

"Pete! How are you—?" her voice faltered.

"Well," he said slowly, wondering how much Ingrid had told them at the hotel—it was Ingrid who had packed and brought home the few things he had kept there—"I'm as all right as I'll ever be."

"Are you married, Pete?"

"No. Are you?"

"Oh, no! But I thought—you knew I phoned, didn't you? I mean, last year. Right after your sister-in-law came here and got your clothes and gave up your room. That was the first I knew about the accident, and of course by that time you were out of the hospital."

He couldn't remember Ingrid's mentioning the call to him. She had probably thought it unimportant—from just a switchboard operator at the hotel. "What did Ingrid say?"

"Not much, except there was nothing to worry about. She said, 'My husband was killed. It happened a month ago. But Pete and I are going to take care of each other from now on.' So I didn't know—From the way she said it, I kind of felt I'd be butting in."

"Nonsense. It's just that Ingrid never talks much, that's all. But it was swell of you to call, Caresse."

"Then you're really all right?"

"Sure," he said. "Except that where my knees ought to be, there's the floor." He waited. He fished out his cigarettes, knocked one from the pack, and managed clumsily to light it. The match fell down inside the crack of the table's partly open drawer. He pulled the drawer wider, to make certain the flame had gone out.

Caresse was saying, "I'd like to come over to Brooklyn and see you, Pete. I could be there in thirty-five minutes."

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Something in the drawer caught his eye. A photograph of himself. And under that, more photos of him. Copies of a snapshot . . . copies and *copies* . . .

His brain reeled.

For he remembered that day, not long after his release from the hospital, coming out on the porch at Ingrid's urging, standing on the steps where she posed him.

"I'm a lovely subject for you!"

"Well, *I* happen to think so. No, wait, Pete. Move over more to the left, will you?"

"Where, right under your rooms-for-rent sign? What a stunning backdrop!"

"The sign doesn't matter. Maybe I won't even get it in."

"I'm going to take that sign down, Ingrid."

"No, I want it. Smile, Pete . . ."

Now, nearly a year later, he sat in Ingrid's bedroom with a sheaf of copies of that day's work clutched in his hand, dazed . . . sick . . . loathing himself . . . and her.

He tore the pile of duplicate snapshots in half and flung them from him.

After a while, with grim calm, he investigated the drawer further. He discovered that Ingrid had an account in a neighborhood bank where, apparently, she deposited most of what he gave her each week, plus the rent Rausch paid her. He also found a passbook lettered *Joint Account of Ingrid and Allen Harper*. It contained regular weekly entries for the past year, averaging about $75 per week.

He hurled the bankbooks back into the drawer and looked at the wall. And there she was, staring down at him. His first oil painting of her. How had he ever thought her lovely? Where was her beauty? The neat mouth was parsimony, the deep eyes were deceit. He suddenly wanted to tear the canvas down, but it hung above his reach. Has she got the better of me in that, too? he raged impotently. Tears began to mingle with the sweat on his face.

It was then that he had thought of the gun lying on his bureau downstairs.

He took to the balustrade, he was down, he was starting for his gun when a door opened on the third floor. Rausch! Pete remained still. It seemed to him he could hear that squeaky shoe of the older man's. No, he couldn't really, not down here. But Rausch would hear *him* if he fired a shot; and suppose he hadn't made a good enough job of it? No, he must wait until the detective came out of the bathroom and went back to his room. *Hurry, can't you, Herman? Do me that favor, that one favor . . .*

The weapon lay on the bureau, just inside the room. Beyond, by the window, was his easel with the new canvas. He did not look at it.

With an ear cocked for Rausch, Pete got a knife from the kitchen.

He had almost gone from his lit-

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tle rear room to the kitchen and back again when the front door opened and Ingrid stepped into the hall. She called out to him. He hid the blade against his side and edged into his room.

But she came after him. "Happy birthday, Pete!" she cried. "I've been out buying you a present. We both forgot your birthday, but someone sent you a card—" She saw his face. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I've been upstairs," Pete said lightly.

"Oh?" Very casually, she crossed his room and laid a cardboard box on his bed.

"Take your box and get out of here," Pete said, "you rotten, lying little—"

She spun around and saw the knife and screamed.

He had slashed savagely at the picture, a single quick stroke, leaving the knife upraised.

Her terrified eyes had run to the door, but he was in the way . . . with the knife, and she had stood rooted, and screamed again . . . and again.

I've got to go up and get those circulars she had printed, Pete thought.

But as he went into the hall where Detective Rausch was phoning, the doorbell sent its chimes pealing through the house. And when he opened the door, there stood Caresse. Caresse in a gray-and-white-print suit and giddy hat, with the old eager smile.

She stooped and kissed him.

"Aren't you going to let me in, Pete?"

"We've had trouble here," he said. "Ingrid's dead."

Caresse stood very still.

Then he realized that she was his big chance and he must take it before Rausch finished talking on the phone. "Will you do something for me, Caresse?"

"Don't you know I'd do anything for you?"

"Caresse, Caresse," he groaned. "Look at me. At what's left—"

"I love you," she said.

And so he sent her up to Ingrid's room, telling her what she had to do . . .

When Rausch came in he growled, "Who was that woman? What's she doing upstairs?"

"A friend," Pete said. "Don't worry about her. Well?"

"The chief's on his way," Rausch said, "he's going to handle this himself. You'd better get the dame out of here."

"No," Pete said.

"You shouldn't have let her in!"

"You couldn't be wronger." And Pete watched and watched as Caresse came down the stairs.

"Then *you* explain her," Rausch barked. A nerve was working in his cheek. "Only you'd better remember. This was an accident."

"An accident," Caresse said. Tears came to her eyes. She fumbled in

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her bag for a handkerchief. "Oh, Pete—"

"I didn't kill her, Caresse. Is that what you thought?"

"It was an accident," Rausch repeated. "Remember that."

"You know damn well it wasn't, Rausch. You came rushing in after she screamed. You grabbed my gun off the bureau and shot her. Why?"

"See here, you young fool," Rausch said thickly, "you'd better get this straight. I heard her screaming and I ran down here. You had a knife, you were going after her. Remember, boy? Or I *thought* you were. My mistake, like I told the captain—get it? Anyway, I fired over your head, not wanting to hit you, but she moved suddenly into the line of fire and got the bullet through her heart. Pure accident. That's how it was. So that's what I told the captain."

Pete felt sorry for him. But that squeaky shoe of Rausch's had given him away. If not for the sound of that shoe Pete wouldn't have turned his head in time to see the other take careful aim at Ingrid before firing.

Pete asked him gently, "Did you have a son who was a cop, Rausch?"

"Something went wrong with my kid," Rausch croaked. "Two normal, decent parents—how does a thing like that happen? I did my best, whaling the tar out of him to teach him right from wrong. Maybe if the missus had lived—"

"He died in that shack, and they made a hero of him. But Ingrid found out about it—she made Allen tell her. She was blackmailing you, Rausch, wasn't she?"

The detective started to answer. But at the shriek of the police siren he turned away, and one shoe squeaked as he went back into the room where Ingrid lay.

Caresse whispered, "I've got all the pictures down inside me, Pete. It's a good thing I wore a skirt with a tight waistband!"

"You didn't have time to read those circulars, did you?"

"No. All I saw was, it was your picture but it had your brother Allen's name under it."

"The lower half of the page was a printed form. A clever begging letter. She mailed them to strangers who wouldn't be likely to run into me—although one did today, a Mrs. Pomeroy, who happened to be visiting in Bay Ridge. They'd see my picture at the top of the page—me, such a worthy cause, standing on my stumps under a rooms-for-rent sign—*that* was a touch of genius. But she gave me Allen's name, to make sure the money got to her."

Caresse murmured, "Darling."

His hand tightened over hers, but he was listening for something else, something that would follow the ring of the police on the bell. A shot. The gun Pete had meant to use on himself would repay murder with suicide.

It would be no kindness to Rausch to interfere.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JACK LONDON**

TITLE: ***The Death Trail***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Near Minto, Alaska

TIME: Early 20th Century

COMMENTS: *Life in the raw: Morganson was at the end of his trail, barely existing, learning how to starve and live . . . waiting, waiting for that precious sledload of life bound south to the sea, sun, and civilization.*

IT WAS THE LAST OF MORGANSON'S bacon. In all his life he had never pampered his stomach. In fact, his stomach had been a sort of negligible quantity that bothered him little, and about which he thought less. But now, in the long absence of wonted delights, the keen yearning of his stomach was tickled hugely by the sharp, salty bacon.

His face had a wistful, hungry expression. The cheeks were hollow, and the skin seemed stretched a trifle tightly across the cheekbones. His pale blue eyes were troubled. There was that in them which showed the haunting imminence of something terrible. Doubt was in them, and anxiety and foreboding. The thin lips were thinner than they were made to be, and they seemed to hunger towards the polished frying pan.

He sat back and drew forth a pipe. He looked into it with sharp scrutiny, and tapped it emptily on his open palm. He turned the pinseal tobacco pouch inside out and dusted the lining, treasuring carefully each flake and mite of tobacco that his efforts gleaned. The result was scarce a thimbleful. He searched in his pockets, and brought forward, between thumb and forefinger, tiny pinches of rubbish. Here and there in this rubbish were crumbs of tobacco. These he segre-

From THE TURTLES OF TASMAN, *originally titled "Finis";*
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gated with microscopic care, though he occasionally permitted small particles of foreign substance to accompany the crumbs to the hoard in his palm. He even deliberately added small, semi-hard woolly fluffs, that had come originally from the coat lining and had lain for long months in the bottoms of the pockets.

At the end of fifteen minutes he had the pipe part filled. He lighted it from the camp fire, and sat forward on the blankets, toasting his moccasined feet and smoking parsimoniously. When the pipe was finished he sat on, brooding into the dying flame of the fire. Slowly the worry went out of his eyes and resolve came in. Out of the chaos of his fortunes he had finally achieved a way. But it was not a pretty way. His face had become stern and wolfish, and the thin lips were drawn very tightly.

He pulled himself stiffly to his feet and proceeded to break camp. He packed the rolled blankets, the frying pan, rifle, and axe on the sled, and passed a lashing around the load. Then he warmed his hands at the fire and pulled on his mittens. He was foot-sore, and limped noticeably as he took his place at the head of the sled. When he put the looped haul-rope over his shoulder and leaned his weight against it to start the sled, he winced. His flesh was galled by many days of contact with the haul-rope.

The trail led along the frozen breast of the Yukon. At the end of four hours he came around a bend and entered the town of Minto. It consisted of a road-house, a saloon, and several cabins. He left his sled at the door and entered the saloon.

"Enough for a drink?" he asked, laying an apparently empty gold sack upon the bar.

The barkeeper held the sack mouth downward over the scales and shook it, and a few flakes of gold dust fell out. Morganson took the sack from him, turned it inside out, and dusted it carefully.

"I thought there was half a dollar in it," he said.

"Not quite," answered the other, "but near enough. I'll get it back on the next comer."

Morganson tilted the bottle and filled the glass to the brim. He drank the liquor slowly, pleasuring in the fire of it that bit his tongue, sank hotly down his throat, and with warm, gentle caresses permeated his stomach.

"Scurvy, eh?" the barkeeper asked.

"A touch of it," he answered. "But I haven't begun to swell yet. Maybe I can get to Dyea and fresh vegetables, and beat it out."

"Kind of all in, I'd say," the other laughed sympathetically. "No dogs, no money, and the scurvy. I'd try spruce tea if I was you."

At the end of half an hour, Morganson said goodbye and left the saloon. He put his galled shoulder to the haul-rope and took the river trail south. An hour later he halted.

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An inviting swale left the river and led off to the right at an acute angle. He left his sled and limped up the swale for half a mile. Between him and the river were three hundred years of flat ground covered with cottonwoods. He crossed the cottonwoods to the bank of the Yukon. The trail went by just beneath, but he did not descend to it. South toward Selkirk he could see the trail widen its sunken length through the snow for over a mile. But to the north, in the direction of Minto, a tree-covered outjut in the bank a quarter of a mile away screened the trail from him.

He seemed satisfied with the view and returned to the sled the way he had come. He put the haul-rope over his shoulder and dragged the sled up the swale. The snow was unpacked and soft, and it was hard work. The runners clogged and stuck, and he was panting severely before he had covered the half-mile. Night had come on by the time he had pitched his small tent, set up the sheet-iron stove, and chopped a supply of firewood. He had no candles, and contented himself with a pot of tea before crawling into his blankets.

In the morning, as soon as he got up, he drew on his mittens, pulled the flaps of his cap down over his ears, and crossed through the cottonwoods to the Yukon. He took his rifle with him. As before, he did not descend the bank. He watched the empty trail for an hour, beating his hands and stamping his feet to keep up the circulation, then returned to the tent for breakfast. There was little tea left in the canister—half a dozen drawings at most; but so meager a pinch did he put in the teapot that he bade fair to extend the lifetime of the tea indefinitely. His entire food supply consisted of half a sack of flour and a part-full can of baking powder. He made biscuits, and ate them slowly, chewing each mouthful with infinite relish. When he had had three he called a halt. He debated a while, reached for another biscuit, then hesitated. He turned to the part sack of flour, lifted it, and judged its weight.

"I'm good for a couple of weeks," he spoke aloud. "Maybe three," he added, as he put the biscuits away.

Again he drew on his mittens, pulled down his ear-flaps, took the rifle, and went out to his station on the river bank. He crouched in the snow, himself unseen, and watched. After a few minutes of inaction, the frost began to bite in, and he rested the rifle across his knees and beat his hands back and forth. Then the sting in his feet became intolerable, and he stepped back from the bank and tramped heavily up and down among the trees. But he did not tramp long at a time. Every few minutes he came to the edge of the bank and peered up and down the trail, as though by sheer will he could materialize the form of a man upon

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it. The short morning passed, though it had seemed century-long to him, and the trail remained empty.

It was easier in the afternoon, watching by the bank. The temperature rose, and soon the snow began to fall — dry and fine and crystalline. There was no wind, and it fell straight down, in quiet monotony. He crouched with eyes closed, his head upon his knees, keeping his watch upon the trail with his ears. But no whining of dogs, churning of sleds, nor cries of drivers broke the silence. With twilight he returned to the tent, cut a supply of firewood, ate two biscuits, and crawled into his blankets. He slept restlessly, tossing about and groaning; and at midnight he got up and ate another biscuit.

Each day grew colder. Four biscuits could not keep up the heat of his body, despite the quantities of hot spruce tea he drank, and he increased his allowance, morning and evening, to three biscuits. In the middle of the day he ate nothing, contenting himself with several cups of excessively weak real tea. This program became routine. In the morning three biscuits, at noon real tea, and at night three biscuits. In between he drank spruce tea for his scurvy. He caught himself making larger biscuits, and after a severe struggle with himself went back to the old size.

On the fifth day the trail returned to life. To the south a dark object appeared, and grew larger. Morganson became alert. He worked his rifle, ejecting a loaded cartridge from the chamber, by the same action replacing it with another, and returning the ejected cartridge into the magazine. He lowered the trigger to half-cock, and drew on his mitten to keep the trigger-hand warm. As the dark object came nearer he made it out to be a man, without dogs or sled, traveling light. He grew nervous, cocked the trigger, then put it back to half-cock again. The man developed into an Indian, and Morganson, with a sigh of disappointment, dropped the rifle across his knees. The Indian went on past and disappeared towards Minto behind the outjutting trees.

But Morganson conceived an idea. He changed his crouching spot to a place where cottonwood limbs projected on either side of him. Into these with his axe he chopped two broad notches. Then in one of the notches he rested the barrel of his rifle and glanced along the sights. He covered the trail thoroughly in that direction. He turned about, rested the rifle in the other notch and, looking along the sights, swept the trail to the clump of trees behind which it disappeared.

He never descended to the trail. A man traveling the trail could have no knowledge of his lurking presence on the bank above. The snow surface was unbroken. There was no place where his tracks left the main trail.

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As the nights grew longer, his periods of daylight watching of the trail grew shorter. Once a sled went by with jingling bells in the darkness, and with sullen resentment he chewed his biscuits and listened to the sounds. Chance conspired against him. Faithfully he had watched the trail for ten days, suffering from the cold all the prolonged torment of the damned, and nothing had happened. Only an Indian, traveling light, had passed in. Now, in the night, when it was impossible for him to watch, men and dogs and a sled loaded with life, passed out, bound south to the sea and the sun and civilization.

So it was that he conceived of the sled for which he waited. It was loaded with life, his life. His life was fading, fainting, gasping away in the tent in the snow. He was weak from lack of food and could not travel himself. But on the sled for which he waited were dogs that would drag him, food that would fan up the flame of his life, money that would furnish sea and sun and civilization. Sea and sun and civilization became terms interchangeable with life, his life, and they were loaded there on the sled for which he waited. The idea became an obsession, and he grew to think of himself as the rightful and deprived owner of the sledload of life.

His flour was running short, and he went back to two biscuits in the morning and two biscuits at night. Because of this his weakness increased and the cold bit in more savagely, and day by day he watched by the dead trail that would not live for him. At last the scurvy entered upon its next stage. The skin was unable longer to cast off the impurity of the blood, and the result was that the body began to swell. His ankles grew puffy, and the ache in them kept him awake long hours at night. Next, the swelling jumped to his knees, and the sum of his pain was more than doubled.

Then there came a cold snap. The temperature went down and down—forty, fifty, sixty degrees below zero. He had no thermometer, but this he knew by the signs and natural phenomena understood by all men in that country—the crackling of water thrown on the snow, the swift sharpness of the bite of the frost, and the rapidity with which his breath froze and coated the canvas walls and roof of the tent. Vainly he fought the cold and strove to maintain his watch on the bank. In his weak condition he was an easy prey, and the frost sank its teeth deep into him before he fled away to the tent and crouched by the fire. His nose and cheeks were frozen and turned black, and his left thumb had frozen inside the mitten. He concluded that he would escape with the loss of the first joint.

Then it was, beaten into the tent by the frost, that the trail, with monstrous irony, suddenly teemed

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with life. Three sleds went by the first day, and two the second. Once, during each day, he fought his way out to the bank only to succumb and retreat, and each of the two times, within half an hour after he retreated, a sled went by.

The cold snap broke, and he was able to remain by the bank once more. But the trail died again. For a week he crouched and watched, and life never stirred along it, not a soul passed in or out. He had cut down to one biscuit night and morning, and somehow he did not seem to notice it. Sometimes he marveled at the way life remained in him. He never would have thought it possible to endure so much.

When the trail fluttered anew with life it was life with which he could not cope. A detachment of the Northwest police went by, a score of them, with many sleds and dogs; and he cowered down on the bank above, and they were unaware of the menace of death that lurked in the form of a dying man beside the trail.

A mail carrier came over the trail, and Morganson let him pass. A mail carrier was an important person, and was sure to be missed immediately.

On the first day after the last of his flour was gone it snowed. It was always warm when the snow fell, and he sat out the whole eight hours of daylight on the bank, without movement, terribly hungry and terribly patient, for all the world like a monstrous spider waiting for its prey. But the prey did not come, and he hobbled back to the tent through the darkness, drank quarts of spruce tea, and went to bed.

The next morning circumstance eased its grip on him. As he started to come out of the tent he saw a huge bull-moose crossing the swale some four hundred yards away. Morganson felt a surge and bound of the blood in him and then went unaccountably weak. A nausea overpowered him, and he was compelled to sit down a moment to recover. Then he reached for his rifle and took careful aim. The first shot was a hit—he knew it; but the moose turned and broke for the wooded hillside that came down to the swale. Morganson pumped bullets wildly among the trees and brush at the fleeing animal, until it dawned upon him that he was exhausting the ammunition he needed for the sledload of life for which he waited.

He stopped shooting, and watched. He noted the direction of the animal's flight. High up on the hillside in an opening among the trees, he saw the trunk of a fallen pine. Continuing the moose's flight in his mind he saw that it must pass the trunk. He resolved on one more shot, and in the empty air above the trunk he aimed and steadied his wavering rifle. The animal sprang into his field of vision with lifted forelegs as it took

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the leap. He pulled the trigger. With the explosion the moose seemed to somersault in the air. It crashed down to earth in the snow beyond and flurried the snow into dust.

Morganson dashed up the hillside —at least, he started to dash up. The next he knew he was coming out of a faint and dragging himself to his feet. He went up more slowly, pausing from time to time to breathe and to steady his reeling senses. At last he crawled over the trunk. The moose lay before him. He sat down heavily upon the carcass and laughed. He buried his face in his mittened hands and laughed some more.

He shook the hysteria from him. He drew his hunting knife and worked as rapidly as his injured thumb and weakness would permit him. He did not stop to skin the moose, but quartered it with its hide on. It was a Klondike of meat.

When he had finished he selected a piece of meat weighing a hundred pounds, and started to drag it down to the tent. But the snow was soft, and it was too much for him. He exchanged it for a twenty-pound piece and, with many pauses to rest, succeeded in getting it to the tent. He fried some of the meat, but ate sparingly. Then, and automatically, he went out to his crouching place on the bank. There were sled-tracks in the fresh snow on the trail. The sledload of life had passed by while he had been cutting up the moose.

But he did not mind. He was glad the sled had not passed before the coming of the moose. The moose had changed his plans. Its meat was worth fifty cents a pound, and he was but little more than three miles from Minto. He need no longer wait for the sledload of life. The moose was the sledload of life. He would sell it. He would buy a couple of dogs at Minto, some food and some tobacco, and the dogs would haul him south along the trail to the sea, the sun, and civilization.

He felt hungry. The dull, monotonous ache of hunger had now become a sharp and insistent pang. He hobbled back to the tent and fried a slice of meat. After that he smoked two whole pipefuls of dried tea leaves. Then he fried another slice of moose. He was aware of an unwonted glow of strength, and he went out and chopped some firewood. He followed that up with a slice of meat. Teased on by the food, his hunger grew into an inflammation. It became imperative every little while to fry a slice of meat. He tried smaller slices and found himself frying oftener.

In the middle of the day he thought of the wild animals that might eat his meat, and he climbed the hill, carrying along his axe, the haul rope, and a sled lashing. In his weak state the making of the cache and storing of the meat was an all-afternoon task. He cut young saplings, trimmed them, and tied

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them together into a tall scaffold. It was not so strong a cache as he would have desired to make, but he had done his best. To hoist the meat to the top was heart-breaking. The larger pieces defied him until he passed the rope over a limb above, and, with one end fast to a piece of meat, put all his weight on the other end.

Once back in the tent, he proceeded to indulge in a prolonged and solitary orgy. He did not need friends. His stomach and he were company. Slice after slice and many slices of meat he fried and ate. He ate pounds of the meat. He brewed real tea, and brewed it strong. He brewed the last he had. It did not matter. On the morrow he would be buying tea in Minto. When it seemed he could eat no more, he smoked. He smoked all his stock of dried tea leaves. What of it? On the morrow he would be smoking tobacco. He knocked out his pipe, fried a final slice, and went to bed. He had eaten so much he seemed bursting, yet he got out of his blankets and had just one more mouthful of meat.

In the morning he awoke as from the sleep of death. In his ears were strange sounds. He did not know where he was and looked about him stupidly until he caught sight of the frying pan with the last piece of meat in it, partly eaten. Then he remembered, and with a quick start turned his attention to the strange sounds. He sprang from the blankets with an oath. His scurvy-ravaged legs gave way under him and he proceeded more slowly to put on his moccasins and leave the tent.

From the cache up the hillside arose a confused noise of snapping and snarling, punctuated by occasional short, sharp yelps. He increased his speed at much expense of pain, and cried loudly and threateningly. He saw the wolves hurrying away through the snow and underbrush, many of them, and he saw the scaffold down on the ground. The animals were heavy with the meat they had eaten, and they were content to slink away and leave the wreckage.

The way of the disaster was clear to him. The wolves had scented his cache. One of them had leaped from the trunk of the fallen tree to the top of the cache. He had not dreamed a wolf could leap so far. A second had followed the first, and a third and fourth, until the flimsy scaffold had gone down under their weight and movement.

His eyes were hard and savage for a moment as he contemplated the extent of the calamity; then the old look of patience returned into them, and he began to gather together the bones, well picked and gnawed. There was marrow in them, he knew; and also, here and there, as he sifted the snow, he found scraps of meat that had escaped the maws of the brutes made careless by plenty.

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He spent the rest of the morning dragging the wreckage of the moose down the hillside. In addition, he had at least ten pounds left of the chunk of meat he had dragged down the previous day.

"I'm good for weeks yet," was his comment as he surveyed the heap.

He had learned how to starve and live. He cleaned his rifle and counted the cartridges that remained to him. There were seven. He loaded the weapon and hobbled out to his crouching place on the bank. All day he watched the dead trail.

He watched all the week, but no life passed over it.

Thanks to the meat he felt stronger, though his scurvy was worse and more painful. He now lived on soup, drinking endless gallons of the thin product of the boiling of the moose bones. The soup grew thinner and thinner as he crackled the bones and boiled them over and over; but the hot water with the essence of the meat in it was good for him, and he was more vigorous than he had been previous to the shooting of the moose.

It was in the next week that a new factor entered into Morganson's life. He wanted to know the date. It became an obsession. He pondered and calculated, but his conclusions were rarely twice the same. The first thing in the morning and the last thing at night, and all day as well watching by the trail, he worried about it. He awoke at night and lay awake for hours over the problem. To have known the date would have been of no value to him; but his curiosity grew until it equalled his hunger and his desire to live.

Finally it mastered him, and he resolved to go to Minto and find out.

It was dark when he arrived at Minto, but this served him. No one saw him arrive. Besides, he knew he would have moonlight by which to return. He climbed the bank and pushed open the saloon door. The light dazzled him. The source of it was several candles, but he had been living for long in an unlighted tent. As his eyes adjusted themselves, he saw three men sitting around the stove. They were trail-travelers—he knew it at once; and since they had not passed in, they were evidently bound out. They would go by his tent next morning.

The barkeeper emitted a long and marveling whistle.

"I thought you was dead," he said.

"Why?" Morganson asked in a faltering voice.

He had become unused to talking, and he was not acquainted with the sound of his own voice. It seemed hoarse and strange.

"You've been dead for more'n two months, now," the barkeeper explained. "You left here going south, and you never arrived at Selkirk. Where have you been?"

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"Chopping wood for the steamboat company," Morganson lied. He was still trying to become acquainted with his own voice. He hobbled across the floor and leaned against the bar. While he maintained an appearance of careless indifference, his heart was beating and pounding. He could not help looking hungrily at the three men by the stove. They were the possessors of life—his life.

"But where in hell you been keeping yourself all this time?" the barkeeper demanded.

"I located across the river," he answered. "I've got a mighty big stack of wood chopped."

The barkeeper nodded. "I heard sounds of chopping several times," he said. "So that was you, eh? Have a drink?"

Morganson clutched the bar tightly. A drink! He could have thrown his arms around the man's legs and kissed his feet.

"But what did you do for grub?" the barkeeper asked. "You don't look as if you could chop wood to keep yourself warm. You look terribly bad, friend."

Morganson yearned towards the delayed bottle and gulped dryly.

"I did the chopping before the scurvy got bad," he said. "Then I got a moose right at the start. I've been living high, all right. It's the scurvy that's run me down."

He filled the glass, and added, "But the spruce tea's knocking it, I think."

"Have another," the barkeeper said.

The action of the two glasses of whiskey on Morganson's empty stomach and weak condition was rapid. The next he knew he was sitting by the stove on a box, and it seemed as though ages had passed. A tall, broad-shouldered, black-whiskered man was paying for drinks from a fat roll, and Morganson's swimming eyes cleared on the instant. They were hundred-dollar bills. It was life! His life! He felt an almost irresistible impulse to snatch the money and dash madly out into the night.

The black-whiskered man and one of his companions arose.

"Come on, Olson," the former said to the third one of the party, a fair-haired, ruddy-faced giant.

Olson came to his feet, yawning and stretching.

"What are you going to bed so soon for?" the barkeeper asked plaintively. "It's early yet."

"Got to make Selkirk tomorrow," said he of the black whiskers.

"On Christmas Day!" the barkeeper cried.

"The better the day the better the deed," the other laughed.

As the three men passed out of the door it came dimly to Morganson that it was Christmas Eve. That was the date. That was what he had come to Minto for. But it was over-shadowed now by the three men themselves, and the fat roll of hundred-dollar bills.

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The door slammed.

"That's Jack Thompson," the barkeeper said. "Made two millions on Bonanza and Sulphur, and got more coming. I'm going to bed. Have another drink first."

Morganson hesitated.

"A Christmas drink," the other urged. "It's all right. I'll get it back when you sell your wood."

Morganson mastered his drunkenness long enough to swallow the whiskey, say good night, and get out on the trail. It was moonlight, and he hobbled along through the bright, silvery quiet, with a vision of life before him that took the form of a roll of hundred-dollar bills . . .

He awoke. It was dark, and he was in his blankets. He had gone to bed in his moccasins and mittens, with the flaps of his cap pulled down over his ears. He got up as quickly as his crippled condition would permit, and built the fire and boiled some water. As he put the spruce-twigs into the teapot he noted the first glimmer of the pale morning light. He caught up his rifle and hobbled in a panic out to the bank. As he crouched and waited, it came to him that he had forgotten to drink his spruce tea. The only other thought in his mind was the possibility of John Thompson's changing his mind and not traveling on Christmas Day.

Dawn broke and merged into day. It was cold and clear. Sixty below zero was Morganson's estimate of the frost. Not a breath stirred the chill Arctic quiet. He sat up suddenly, his muscular tension increasing the hurt of the scurvy. He had heard the far sound of a man's voice and the faint whining of dogs. He began beating his hands back and forth against his sides.

They came into view around the outjutting clump of trees. To the fore was the third man whose name he had not learned. Then came eight dogs drawing the sled. At the front of the sled, guiding it by the gee-pole, walked John Thompson. The rear was brought up by Olsen, the Swede. He was certainly a fine man, Morganson thought as he looked at the bulk of him in his squirrel-skin *parka*. The men and dogs were silhouetted sharply against the white of the landscape.

Morganson rested his cocked rifle in the notch in the tree. He became abruptly aware that his fingers were cold and discovered that his right hand was bare. He did not know that he had taken off the mitten. He slipped it on again hastily. The men and dogs drew closer, and he could see their breaths spouting into visibility in the cold air. When the first man was fifty yards away, Morganson slipped the mitten from his right hand. He placed the first finger on the trigger and aimed low. When he fired the first man whirled half around and went down on the trail.

In the instant of surprise, Mor-

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ganson pulled the trigger on John Thompson—too low, for the latter staggered and sat down suddenly on the sled. Morganson raised his aim and fired again. John Thompson sank down backward along the top of the loaded sled.

Morganson turned his attention to Olson. At the same time that he noted the latter running away towards Minto he noted that the dogs, coming to where the first man's body blocked the trail, had halted. Morganson fired at the fleeing man and missed, and Olson swerved. He continued to swerve back and forth, while Morganson fired twice in rapid succession and missed both shots. Morganson stopped himself just as he was pulling the trigger again. He had fired six shots. Only one more cartridge remained, and it was in the chamber. It was imperative that he should not miss his last shot.

He held his fire and desperately studied Olson's flight. The giant was grotesquely curving and twisting and running at top speed along the trail, the tail of his *parka* flapping smartly behind. Morganson trained his rifle on the man and with a swaying action followed his erratic flight. Morganson's finger was getting numb. He could scarcely feel the trigger.

"God help me," he breathed a prayer aloud, and pulled the trigger.

The running man pitched forward on his face, rebounded from the hard trail, and slid along, rolling over and over. He threshed for a moment with his arms and then lay quiet.

Morganson dropped his rifle and slid down the bank through the soft snow. He hobbled along the trail to the sled, his fingers making involuntary gripping and clutching movements inside the mittens.

The snarling of the dogs halted him. The leader, a heavy dog, half Newfoundland and half Hudson Bay, stood over the body of the man that lay on the trail and menaced Morganson with bristling hair and bared fangs. The other seven dogs of the team were likewise bristling and snarling. Morganson approached tentatively, and the team surged towards him. He stopped again and talked to the animals, threatening and cajoling by turns. He noticed the face of the man under the leader's feet and was surprised at how quickly it had turned white with the ebb of life and the entrance of the frost. John Thompson lay back along the top of the loaded sled, his head sunk in a space between two sacks and his chin tilted upwards, so that all Morganson could see was the black beard pointing skyward.

Finding it impossible to face the dogs, Morganson stepped off the trail into the deep snow and floundered in a wide circle to the rear of the sled. Under the initiative of the leader, the team swung around in its tangled harness. Because of his crippled condition, Morganson

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could move only slowly. He saw the animals circling him and tried to retreat. But the big leader, with a savage lunge, sank its teeth into the calf of his leg. The flesh slashed and torn, Morganson managed to drag himself clear.

He cursed the brutes fiercely but could not cow them. They replied with neck-bristling and snarling and quick lunges against their breastbands. He remembered Olson, and turned his back upon them and went along the trail. He scarcely took notice of his lacerated leg. It was bleeding freely; the main artery had been torn, but he did not know it.

Especially remarkable to Morganson was the extreme pallor of the Swede, who the preceding night had been so ruddy-faced. Now his face was like white marble. What with his fair hair and lashes he looked like a carved statue rather than something that had been a man a few minutes before. Morganson pulled off his mittens and searched the body. There was no money-belt around the waist next to the skin, nor did he find a gold-sack. In a breast pocket he lit on a small wallet. With fingers that swiftly went numb with the frost, he hurried through the contents of the wallet. There were letters with foreign stamps and postmarks on them, and several receipts and memorandum accounts, and a letter of credit for eight hundred dollars. There was no money.

He made a movement to start back toward the sled but found his foot rooted to the trail. He glanced down and saw that he stood in a fresh deposit of frozen red. There was red ice on his torn pants leg and on the moccasin beneath. With a quick effort he broke the frozen clutch of his blood and hobbled along the trail to the sled. The big leader that had bitten him began snarling and lunging, and was followed in this conduct by the whole team.

Morganson wept weakly for a space, swaying from one side to the other. Then he brushed away the frozen tears that gemmed his lashes. It was a joke. Malicious chance was having its laugh at him. Even John Thompson, with his heaven-aspiring whiskers, was laughing at him.

He prowled around the sled, at times weeping and pleading with the brutes for his life there on the sled, at other times raging impotently against them. Then calmness came upon him. He had been making a fool of himself. All he had to do was to go to the tent, get the axe, and return and brain the dogs. He'd show them.

In order to get to the tent he had to go wide of the sled and the savage animals. He stepped off the trail into the soft snow. Then he felt suddenly giddy and stood still. He was afraid to go on for fear he would fall down. He stood still for a long time, balancing himself on

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crippled legs that were trembling violently from weakness. He looked down and saw the snow reddening at his feet. The blood was still flowing freely. He had not thought the bite was so severe. He controlled his giddiness and stopped to examine the wound. The snow seemed rushing up to meet him, and he recoiled from it as from a blow. He had a panic fear that he might fall down and after a struggle he managed to stand upright again. He was afraid of that snow that had rushed up to him.

Then the white glimmer turned black, and the next he knew he was awakening in the snow where he had fallen. He was no longer giddy. The cobwebs were gone. But he could not get up. There was no strength in his limbs. By a desperate effort he managed to roll over on his side. In this position he caught a glimpse of the sled and of John Thompson's black beard pointing skyward. Also he saw the lead dog licking the face of the man who lay on the trail. Morganson watched curiously. The dog was nervous and eager. Sometimes it uttered short, sharp yelps, as though to arouse the man, and surveyed him with ears cocked forward and wagging tail. At last it sat down, pointed its nose upward, and began to howl. Soon all the team was howling.

Now that he was down, Morganson was no longer afraid. He had a vision of himself being found dead in the snow and for a while he wept in self-pity. But he was not afraid. The struggle had gone out of him. When tried to open his eyes he found that the wet tears had frozen them shut. He did not try to brush the ice away. It did not matter. He had not dreamed death was so easy. He was even angry that he had struggled and suffered through so many weary weeks. He had been bullied and cheated by the fear of death. Death did not hurt. Every torment he had endured had been a torment of life. Life had defamed death.

But his anger passed. The lies and frauds of life were of no consequence now that he was coming to his own. He became aware of drowsiness and felt a sweet sleep stealing upon him, balmy with promises of easement and rest. He heard faintly the howling of the dogs, and had a fleeting thought that in the mastering of his flesh the frost no longer bit. Then the light and the thought ceased to pulse beneath the tear-gemmed eyelids, and with a tired sigh of comfort he sank into sleep.

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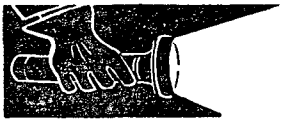

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Regular EQMM readers have noticed that there was, for the first time in a dozen years, no prize contest in this magazine in 1958—and yet no falling off in quality of stories, as is nobly demonstrated in ELLERY QUEEN'S 13TH ANNUAL (Random, $3.50). Here are 13 stories, of which my favorites are by Bloch, Ellin, Tyre and Masterson; but all 13 are fine, and you'd best doublecheck to see that you didn't miss any.

★★★★ **THE EIGHTH CIRCLE, *by Stanley Ellin*** (Random, $3.50)

EQMM's master of the short story masterfully tackles an unusually long novel on the nature of private detectives and private detection—subtle, complex and compassionate.

★★★ **TETHER'S END, *by Margery Allingham*** (Doubleday, $3.50)

Taut, credible study of a young murderer very like J. G. Haigh, of the 1949 acid baths, and his eventual destruction (with Mr. Campion more observer than detective). Miss Allingham's most satisfactory post-war novel.

★★★ **ROBINSON, *by Muriel Spark*** (Lippincott, $3.50)

Desert-island murder mystery spoofed with exquisite taste and finesse—highly individual and (for the right reader) delightful.

★★★ **THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED, *by Edgar Bohle*** (Random, $2.95)

First novel in the Hitchcockian vein—a mite underplotted but splendid in its exciting use of everyday locales.

★★★ **KILLER AMONG US, *by Robert Martin*** (Dodd, Mead, $2.95)

Jim Bennett investigates industrial sabotage—and the making of abrasives is as fascinating as the above-average detective story.

THE NEW YORK MURDERS (Little, Brown, $4) is a welcome omnibus of 3 sharply contrasting Ellery Queen novels: THE AMERICAN GUN MYSTERY (1933), CAT OF MANY TAILS (1949) and THE SCARLET LETTERS (1953). And don't overlook two of Queen's Hollywood novels (both 1938): THE DEVIL TO PAY (Pocket Books, 25¢) and THE FOUR OF HEARTS (Avon, 35¢).

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***Not the Running Type***

TYPE: Detective-Crime Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Milt Potter was the mildest and tamest embezzler in all the annals of crime. He made the investigation by the police easy—one might even say, too easy...*

"HOW DUMB CAN YOU GET!" Captain Ernest Fisher said, and slapped the desk blotter so hard that the calendar pad danced. Hogan, the bright-faced lieutenant of police, looked up from the standing files and asked a question with his eyebrows.

Fisher rattled the sheet in his hand. "I just got a look at this memo that came in last week—the one giving the names of parolees in the vicinity. It's got Milt Potter listed."

"Who's Milt Potter?"

"You mean I never told you about him?"

"No, sir."

"Take a look at the '46 file while you're there—under embezzlement. That's Milton Potter, spelled the way it sounds. Bring it over and I'll tell you the story."

Hogan slid shut the drawer he was investigating and obeyed the order. He brought the manila folder to the Captain's desk and flipped the cover to the first entry.

"Milton Potter," he read. "Age thirty-four; single; employment, Metro Investment Services, Inc. . . ."

"That's the man," Fisher nodded. He leaned back in the swivel chair and put his feet on the desk. "Tamest criminal you ever met in your life, or maybe the coolest. Walked off with two hundred thousand dollars of investors' money, easy as stealing fruit from a push-cart. But now he's a free man."

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"Paroled?"

"Two days ago," Fisher scowled. "I had his release date on my calendar for twelve years—and then I don't watch the memos! But it won't make any difference. Two days, two weeks—I got Milt Potter's number."

The Captain lit a cigarette, then put the pack in front of him, readying himself for a siege of story-telling.

"It happened back in March of 1946. I was a looie like you then, and maybe even more of an eager beaver than you are now. I got called in when the Metro Investment discovered the shortage, but I didn't have any work to do. Milt Potter did it for me.

"Potter was a funny guy. He was short and kind of owlish-looking, with sad brown eyes like a cocker spaniel. He had worked for Metro Services since he got out of college, a total of thirteen years, and he was still making only sixty bucks a week. He had no family, and few friends. He was quiet, courteous, commonplace, and careful. Nobody could tell you anecdotes about him, or even describe him very well—we found that out when he showed up missing. He went about his duties without ever complaining or revealing the secret intention that must have burned inside his guts for years.

"Then it happened. One day Potter didn't report for work and nobody even cared very much. But when he didn't show up the next day, somebody thought it might be a good idea to call his home and see if he had broken a leg or something. There wasn't any answer. They didn't get *really* disturbed about it until three days after that, when Potter was still unreported. It took all that time to get suspicious—that's the kind of cookie Milt Potter was.

"Anyway, they finally came to their senses and made a quick check of Potter's books. They didn't even have to call in the auditors to determine that something wasn't on the up and up. There were great big obvious holes in Potter's accounting, and great big chunks of money missing, amounting to two hundred grand. Sure, Potter was the last guy in the world they would expect it from, but isn't it always that way?

"So at this point they got real frantic and hollered cop. The Chief put me on assignment, and I went down to talk to them. I made a check on Potter and it was pretty surprising. He wasn't at his rooming house, and his landlady didn't know his whereabouts, but he hadn't covered his trail worth a damn. His clothes and luggage were still in the room, and there were travel folders all over the place. Obviously, Potter had made plans for the money.

"I figured it wouldn't be too difficult a task to find him, but I never even got the chance to prove my-

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self. I guess maybe that's why I was so upset over the case—the son of a gun cheated me out of my first big arrest! Because one day after Metro Services called in the police, Milton Potter walked into the precinct house and gave himself up.

"Well, maybe that wasn't so surprising at that—a lot of first-timers lose their nerve after a job is pulled. But Potter didn't look like a victim of the jitters. He was calm and rational, and all he said was, here I am, I took the money, do what you have to do.

"I grilled him for hours, but he stayed nice and cool all the time. Not cool the way some of these hoods you're dealing with are—a respectable kind of coolness. But the one point he wouldn't volunteer any information on was the location of the money. He clammed up tight every time I mentioned it. He was willing to confess, willing to go to jail for his crime, all right. But give up the dough? Uh-uh.

"Well, I really worked him over—in a legitimate way, of course. I told him that he was being a patsy, that it meant a fifteen- or twenty-year stretch for him if he kept up his attitude. I told him he would probably get off real light if he returned the dough—after all, it was his first offense. If he gave back the two hundred grand, both Metro and the insurance company would go easy on him. I practically promised it.

"But Milt Potter didn't see it that way; he stuck to his guns. He claimed he had taken the money because he thought he could get away with it, then realized he wasn't cut out to be a hunted criminal. He couldn't stand the idea of being hounded for the rest of his life—he just wasn't the running type. So he had given himself up. But what did he do with the money? That was a different story. He didn't care a hoot what we did to him—just so long as he didn't have to return the loot. That's the way he wanted it, and that's the way it turned out.

"The trial was short and sweet. He pleaded guilty, and got a fifteen-year sentence.

"I knew what he was up to, of course, and so did everybody else. He was making an investment—an investment of his time and his freedom in exchange for riches when he got out of prison. I guess he was a type that didn't mind prison life too much. He had spent five years in the Army during the war, and the regimentation suited his personality to a T. He liked being told where to go and what to do; I tried to convince him that prison wasn't the same thing, but he didn't seem to care.

"That was back in '46, like I said. Potter was a model prisoner from the day he walked through the gates. He worked in the library most of the time, and did a lot reading—travel books, mainly. He got three years clipped off his sentence

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for good behavior. Well, now he's got two days head start, but it won't matter."

Captain Fisher crushed out his third cigarette, and Hogan said:

"What happens now, Captain? Does he get away with the dough?"

Fisher shook his head sadly. "That's the tough part. He wouldn't believe me when I told him twelve years ago, but he's not going to profit from his investment. That two hundred grand doesn't belong to him, even if he thinks he earned it by a stretch in prison. I'm going to pay him a visit and tell him the facts of life."

"You mean you're going to see him today?"

"Sure," Fisher said. "I've had this appointment for a long time."

The address Captain Fisher obtained from the parole officials was a boarding house in the twenties, not far from Milt Potter's old neighborhood.

Potter was in his shirt sleeves when he answered the Captain's knock, and Fisher wondered if the dozen years had had so little effect on himself as it had on the ex-convict. He was still a short, owlish man with sad brown eyes, and the only marked inroads of time were a few light lines on his face and a patch of thinning hair on his head. He looked puzzled when he saw the Captain, and then distraught when recognition lit up his eyes.

"I'm Captain Ernest Fisher—you remember me, Mr. Potter?"

"Of course," Potter said nervously. "Come on in."

"Thanks. I was Lieutenant Fisher when we met the last time, Mr. Potter." He took a chair near the window and looked around the room casually. There was a closed suitcase on the wrought-iron bed.

"What was it you wanted, Captain?"

"Just to talk. It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

"Yes, it has."

"I understood you did pretty well in prison—nobody has any complaints about your conduct that I know about. Pays, doesn't it? Getting out sooner, I mean."

"Yes," Potter said, not looking at him. He went to the wash basin and rinsed his hands in cold water.

"I won't beat around the bush, Mr. Potter. I'm here for a reason, and I think you know what it is. There's still a matter of two hundred thousand dollars, and neither the police nor the insurance company are going to forget it. The fact that you served your sentence doesn't entitle you to the money, no matter what you think."

Potter didn't answer. He dried his hands on a thin towel and gazed out of the window towards the skyline. In the distance a ship blew its horn twice.

"There's no use being coy about it, Mr. Potter. It was obvious to everybody what your plan was. You thought you could earn that money

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with your time, but that's not the way these things are done. And I just wanted you to know that I'm making it my *personal* duty to see that you don't carry out your plan."

Fisher waited for Potter to say something. Finally, the parolee turned and answered, almost in a whisper.

"You have things all wrong, Captain."

"Really?"

"You have it all wrong about me. I know that's what everybody thinks, but they're wrong. I took that money because I wanted it, wanted it very much. I've always dreamed of traveling round the world, ever since I was a little boy, and I couldn't resist the temptation to take the money when it was so easily available. But after I took it, I realized that I wasn't the criminal type—not in the least."

He came over and sat in the chair opposite.

"I couldn't bear the idea of being hunted, living in fear all the time. Always jumping at shadows, always looking over my shoulder. Oh, maybe I had some wild idea about serving out my sentence and then running off with the money when I got out. But that would be exactly the same thing—running, afraid to live in the open, unable to enjoy any of the pleasures the money would bring me. I'm just not made that way, Captain."

Fisher stared at him.

"I thought prison wouldn't be hard to take, and in some ways it wasn't. But I had time to think everything out, and now I know what I have to do. So if you want the money, Captain, I'm ready to give it back."

"You're *what*?"

"All I want is to be let alone, Captain. All I want is to live in peace. Don't you understand?"

"Then where's the money?"

Potter swallowed.

"Right here—right here in this room."

He got up, went to the suitcase on the bed, and opened it. It was crammed with money.

The travel agent beamed when the short, owlish man walked into the office and said:

"I'm interested in a round-the-world cruise."

"Yes, sir!"

"But I want the best, understand? I don't care about the cost."

"I understand perfectly," the travel agent said.

Milt Potter sat down, gratefully. The last three days had been fatiguing. It had been an effort, visiting twenty city banks, signing twenty different names to twenty withdrawal slips. But the task was over, and he had his money. It wasn't a fortune, but it was more than he could have saved or even earned in the last twelve, tax-free, all expense-paid years. $84,000 interest, compounded over a dozen years on his capital investment.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	AGATHA CHRISTIE
TITLE:	*The Sign in the Sky*
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Harley Quin and Mr. Satterthwaite
LOCALE:	Deering Hill, England
TIME:	About 1930
COMMENTS:	*The mysterious Mr. Quin—irritant to Mr. Satterthwaite's oyster. The result?—a pearl of a solution in a very clever tale.*

THE JUDGE WAS FINISHING HIS charge to the jury.

"Now, gentlemen, I have almost finished what I want to say to you. There is evidence for you to consider as to whether this case is plainly made out against this man so that you may say he is guilty of the murder of Vivien Barnaby. You have had the evidence of the servants as to the time the shot was fired. They have one and all agreed upon it. You have had the evidence of the letter written to the defendant by Vivien Barnaby on the morning of that same day, Friday, September 23rd, a letter which the defense has not attempted to deny. You have had evidence that the prisoner first denied having been at Deering Hill, and later, after evidence had been given by the police, admitted he had. You will draw your own conclusions from that denial. This is not a case of direct evidence. You will have to come to your own conclusions on the subject of motive—of means—of opportunity. The contention of the defense is that some person unknown entered the music room after the defendant had left it, and shot Vivien Barnaby with the gun which by a strange forgetfulness the defendant had left behind. You have heard the defendant's story of the reason it took him half an hour to get home. If you disbelieve the

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defendant's story and are satisfied, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the defendant did, upon Friday, September 23rd, discharge his gun at close quarters to Vivien Barnaby's head with intent to kill her, then, gentlemen, your verdict must be guilty. If, on the other hand, you have any reasonable doubt, it is your duty to acquit the prisoner. I will now ask you to retire to your room and consider and let me know when you have arrived at a conclusion."

The jury was absent a little under half an hour. They returned the verdict that to everyone had seemed a foregone conclusion—the verdict of "Guilty."

Mr. Satterthwaite left the court after hearing the verdict, with a thoughtful frown on his face.

A mere murder trial, as such, did not attract him. He was of too fastidious a temperament to find interest in the sordid details of the average crime. But the Wylde case had been different. Young Martin Wylde was what is termed a gentleman—and the victim, Sir George Barnaby's young wife, had been personally known to the elderly gentleman.

He was thinking of all this as he walked up Holborn and then plunged into a tangle of mean streets leading in the direction of Soho. In one of these streets there was a small retaurant, known only to the few, of whom Mr. Satterthwaite was one. It was not cheap—it was on the contrary, exceedingly expensive, since it catered exclusively for the palate of the jaded gourmet. It was quiet—no strains of jazz were allowed to disturb the hushed atmosphere—it was rather dark; waiters appeared soft-footed out of the twilight, bearing silver dishes with the air of participating in some holy rite. The name of the restaurant was Arlecchino.

Still thoughtful, Mr. Satterthwaite turned into the Arlecchino and made for his favorite table in a recess in the far corner. Owing to the twilight before mentioned, it was not until he was quite close to it that he saw it was already occupied by a tall, dark man who sat with his face in shadow, and with a play of color from a stained window turning his sober garb to a kind of riotous motley.

Mr. Satterthwaite would have turned back, but just at that moment the stranger moved slightly and the other recognized him.

"God bless my soul," said Mr. Satterthwaite, who was given to old-fashioned expressions. "Why, it's Mr. Quin!"

Three times before he had met Mr. Quin, and each time the meeting had resulted in something a little out of the ordinary. A strange person, this Mr. Quin, with a knack of showing you the things you had known all along in a totally different light.

At once Mr. Satterthwaite felt excited — pleasurably excited. His

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role was that of the looker-on, and he knew it, but sometimes when in the company of Mr. Quin he had the illusion of being an actor—and the principal actor at that.

"This is very pleasant," he said, beaming all over his dried-up little face. "Very pleasant indeed. You've no objection to my joining you, I hope?"

"I shall be delighted," said Mr. Quin. "As you see I have not yet begun my meal."

A deferential head waiter hovered up out of the shadows. Mr. Satterthwaite, as befitted a man with a seasoned palate, gave his whole mind to the task of selection. In a few minutes the head waiter, a slight smile of approbation on his lips, retired, and a young satellite began his ministrations. Mr. Satterthwaite turned to Mr. Quin.

"I have just come from the Old Bailey," he began. "A sad business, I thought."

"He was found guilty?" said Mr. Quin.

"Yes, the jury was out only half an hour."

Mr. Quin bowed his head.

"An inevitable result—on the evidence," he said.

"And yet," began Mr. Satterthwaite—and stopped.

Mr. Quin finished the sentence for him.

"And yet your sympathies were with the accused? Is that what you were going to say?"

"I suppose it was. Martin Wylde is a nice-looking young fellow—one can hardly believe it of him. All the same, there have been a good many nice-looking young fellows who have turned out to be murderers of a particularly cold-blooded and repellent type."

"Too many," said Mr. Quin quietly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Sattherthwaite, slightly startled.

"Too many for Martin Wylde. There has been a tendency from the beginning to regard this as just one more of a series of the same type of crime—a man seeking to free himself from one woman in order to marry another."

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite, doubtfully. "On the evidence—"

"Ah!" said Mr. Quin quickly, "I am afraid I have not followed all the evidence."

Mr. Satterthwaite's self-confidence came back to him with a rush. He felt a sudden sense of power. He was tempted to be consciously dramatic.

"Let me try and show it to you. I have met the Barnabys, you understand. I know the peculiar circumstances. With me, you will come behind the scenes—you will see the thing from inside."

Mr. Quin leaned forward with his quick encouraging smile.

"If anyone can show me that, it will be Mr. Satterthwaite," he murmured.

Mr. Satterthwaite gripped the table with both hands. He was up-

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lifted, carried out of himself. For the moment he was an artist pure and simple—an artist whose medium was words.

Swiftly, with a dozen broad strokes, he etched in the picture of life at Deering Hill. Sir George Barnaby, elderly, obese, purse-proud. A man perpetually fussing over the little things of life. A man who wound up his clocks every Friday afternoon, and who paid his own housekeeping books every Tuesday morning, and who saw to the locking of his own front door every night. A careful man.

From Sir George he went on to Lady Barnaby. Here his touch was gentler, but none the less sure. He had seen her but once, but his impression of her was definite and lasting. A vivid, defiant creature—pitifully young. A trapped child, that was how he described her.

"She hated him, you understand? She had married him before she realized what she was doing. And now—"

She was desperate—that was how he put it. Turning this way and that. She had no money of her own; she was entirely dependent on this elderly husband. But all the same she was a creature at bay—still unsure of her own powers, with a beauty that was as yet more promise than actuality. And she was greedy. Mr. Satterthwaite affirmed that definitely. Side by side with defiance there ran a greedy streak—a clasping and a clutching at life.

"I never met Martin Wylde," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "But I heard of him. He lived less than a mile away. Farming, that was his line. And she took an interest in farming—or pretended to. If you ask me, it was pretending. I think that she saw in him her only way of escape—and she grabbed at him, greedily, like a child might have done. Well, there could only be one end to that. We know what that end was, because the letters were read out in court. He kept her letters—she didn't keep his, but from the text of hers one can see that he was cooling off. He admits as much. There was the other girl. She also lived in the village of Deering Vale. Her father was the doctor there. You saw her in court, perhaps? No, I remember, you were not there, you said. I shall have to describe her to you. A fair girl—very fair. Gentle. Perhaps—yes, perhaps a tiny bit stupid. But very restful, you know. And loyal. Above all, loyal."

He looked at Mr. Quin for encouragement, and Mr. Quin gave it him by a slow appreciative smile. Mr. Satterthwaite went on.

"You heard that last letter read—you must have seen it, in the papers, I mean. The one written on the morning of Friday, September 13th. It was full of desperate reproaches and vague threats, and

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it ended by begging Martin Wylde to come to Deering Hill that same evening at six o'clock. *'I will leave the side door open for you, so that no one need know you have been here. I shall be in the music room.'* It was sent by hand."

Mr. Satterthwaite paused for a few moments.

"When he was first arrested, Martin Wylde denied that he had been to the house at all that evening. His statement was that he had taken his gun and gone out shooting in the woods. But when the police brought forward their evidence, that statement broke down. They had found his fingerprints, both on the wood of the side door and on one of the two cocktail glasses on the table in the music room. He admitted then that he had come to see Lady Barnaby, that they had had a stormy interview, but that it had ended in his having managed to soothe her down. He swore that he left his gun outside leaning against the wall near the door, and that he left Lady Barnaby alive and well, the time being then a minute or two after a quarter past six. He went straight home, he says, but evidence was called to show that he did not reach his farm until a quarter to seven, and, as I have just mentioned, it is barely a mile away. It would not take half an hour to get there. He forgot all about his gun, he declares. Not a very likely statement—and yet—"

"And yet?" queried Mr. Quin.

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite slowly, "it's a possible one, isn't it? Counsel ridiculed the supposition, of course, but I think he was wrong. You see, I've known a good many young men, and these emotional scenes upset them very much—especially the dark nervous type like Martin Wylde. Women, now, can go through a scene like that, and feel positively better for it afterward, with all their wits about them. It acts like a safety valve for them, steadies their nerves and all that. But I can see Martin Wylde going away with his head in a whirl, sick and miserable, and without a thought of the gun he had left leaning up against the wall.

"Not that it matters. For the next part is only too clear, unfortunately. It was exactly twenty minutes past six when the shot was heard. All the servants heard it, the cook, the kitchen-maid, the butler, the housemaid, and Lady Barnaby's own maid. They came rushing to the music room. She was lying over the arm of her chair. The gun had been discharged close to the back of her head, so that the shot hadn't a chance to scatter. At least two of them penetrated the brain."

He paused and Mr. Quin asked casually, "The servants gave evidence, I suppose?"

Mr. Satterthwaite nodded. "Yes. The butler got there a second or two before the others, but their evidence was practically a repeti-

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tion of each other's."

"So they *all* gave evidence," said Mr. Quin musingly. "There were no exceptions?"

"Now that I remember it," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "the housemaid was only called at the inquest. She's gone to Canada since, I believe."

"I see," said Mr. Quin.

There was a silence, and the air of the little restaurant seemed to be charged with an uneasy feeling. Mr. Satterthwaite felt suddenly as if he were on the defensive.

"Why shouldn't she?" he said abruptly.

"Why should she?" said Mr. Quin with a very slight shrug.

Somehow the question annoyed Mr. Satterthwaite. He wanted to shy away from it to get back on familiar ground.

"There couldn't be much doubt who fired the shot. As a matter of fact, the servants seemed to have lost their heads a bit. There was no one in the house to take charge. It was some minutes before anyone thought of ringing up the police, and when they did so, they found that the telephone was out of order."

"Oh," said Mr. Quin. "The telephone was out of order."

"It was," said Mr. Satterthwaite —and was struck suddenly by the feeling that he had said something tremendously important. "It might, of course, have been done on purpose," he said slowly. "But there seems no point in that. Death was practically instantaneous."

Mr. Quin said nothing, and Mr. Satterthwaite felt that his explanation was unsatisfactory.

"There was absolutely no one to suspect but young Wylde," he went on. "By his own account he was only out of the house three minutes before the shot was fired. And who else could have fired it? Sir George was at a bridge party a few houses away. He left there at half-past six and was met just outside the gate by a servant bringing him the news. The last rubber finished at half-past six exactly — no doubt about that. Then there was Sir George's secretary, Henry Thompson. He was in London that day, and actually at a business meeting at the moment the shot was fired. Finally there is Sylvia Dale who, after all, had a perfectly good motive, impossible as it seems that she should have had anything to do with such a crime. She was at the station of Deering Vale seeing a friend off by the 6:28 train. That lets her out. Then the servants. What earthly motive could any one of them have? Besides they all arrived on the spot practically simultaneously. No, it must have been Martin Wylde."

But he said it in a dissatisfied kind of voice.

They went on with their lunch. Mr. Quin was not in a talkative mood, and Mr. Satterthwaite had said all he had to say. But the silence was not a barren one. It

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was filled with the growing dissatisfaction of Mr. Satterthwaite, heightened and fostered in some strange way by the mere quiescence of the other man.

Mr. Satterthwaite suddenly put down his knife and fork with a clatter.

"Supposing that that young man is really innocent," he said. "He's going to be hanged."

He looked very startled and upset about it. And still Mr. Quin said nothing.

"It's not as though—" began Mr. Satterthwaite, and stopped. "Why shouldn't the woman go to Canada?" he ended inconsequently.

Mr. Quin shook his head.

"I don't even know what part of Canada she went to," continued Mr. Satterthwaite peevishly.

"Could you find out?" suggested the other.

"I suppose I could. The butler, now. He'd know. Or possibly Thompson, the secretary."

He paused again. When he resumed speech, his voice sounded almost pleading.

"It's not as though it were anything to do with me?"

"That a young man is going to be hanged in a little over three weeks?"

"Well, yes—if you put it that way, I suppose. Yes, I see what you mean. Life and death. And that poor girl, too. It's not that I'm hard-hearted—but, after all—what good will it do? Isn't the whole thing rather fantastic? Even if I found out where the woman's gone to in Canada—why, it would probably mean that I should have to go out there myself."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked seriously upset.

"And I was thinking of going to the Riviera next week," he said pathetically.

And his glance toward Mr. Quin said as plainly as it could be said: "Do let me off, won't you?"

"You have never been to Canada?"

"Never."

"A very interesting country."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked at him undecidedly.

"You think I ought to go?"

Mr. Quin leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette. Between puffs he spoke deliberately.

"You are, I believe a rich man, Mr. Satterthwaite. Not a millionaire, but a man able to indulge a hobby without counting the expense. You have looked on at the dramas of other people. Have you never contemplated stepping in and playing a part? Have you never seen yourself for a minute as the arbiter of other people's destinies—standing in the center of the stage with life and death in your hands?"

Mr. Satterthwaite leaned forward. The old eagerness surged over him.

"You mean—if I go on this wild goose chase to Canada—"

Mr. Quin smiled. "Oh, it was

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your suggestion, going to Canada, not mine," he said lightly.

"You can't put me off like that," said Mr. Satterthwaite earnestly. "Whenever I have come across you —" He stopped.

"Well?"

"There is something about you I do not understand. Perhaps I never shall. The last time I met you—"

"On Midsummer Eve."

Mr. Satterthwaite was startled, as though the words held a clue that he did not quite understand.

"Was it Midsummer Eve?" he asked confusedly.

"Yes. But let us not dwell on that. It is unimportant, is it not?"

"Since you say so," said Mr. Satterthwaite courteously. He felt that elusive clue slipping through his fingers. "When I come back from Canada—" he paused a little awkwardly—"I—I—should much like to see you again."

"I am afraid I have no fixed address for the moment," said Mr. Quin regretfully. "But I often come to this place. If you also frequent it, we shall no doubt meet before very long."

They parted pleasantly.

Mr. Satterthwaite was very excited. He hurried round to Cook's and inquired about boat sailings. Then he rang up Deering Hill. The voice of a butler, suave and deferential, answered him.

"My name is Satterthwaite. I am speaking for a—er—firm of solicitors. I wished to make a few inquiries about a young woman who was recently housemaid in your establishment."

"Would that be Louisa, sir? Louisa Bullard?"

"That is the name," said Mr. Satterthwaite, very pleased to be told it.

"I regret she is not in this country, sir. She went to Canada six months ago."

"Can you give me her present address?"

The butler was afraid he couldn't. It was a place in the mountains she had gone to—a Scotch name—ah, Banff, that was it. Some of the other young women in the house had been expecting to hear from her, but she had never written or given them any address.

Mr. Satterthwaite thanked him and rang off. He was still undaunted. The adventurous spirit was strong in his breast. He would go to Banff. If this Louisa Bullard was there, he would track her down somehow or other.

To his own surprise he enjoyed the trip greatly. It was many years since he had taken a long sea voyage. The Riviera, Le Touquet and Deauville, and Scotland had been his usual round. The feeling that he was setting off on an impossible mission added a secret zest to his journey. What an utter fool these fellow travelers of his would think him did they but know the object of his quest! But then—they were

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not acquainted with Mr. Quin.

In Banff he found his objective easily attained. Louisa Bullard was employed in the large hotel there. Twelve hours after his arrival he was standing face to face with her.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, anemic-looking, but with a strong frame. She had pale brown hair inclined to curl, and a pair of honest brown eyes. She was, he thought, slightly stupid, but very trustworthy.

She accepted quite readily his statement that he had been asked to collect a few further facts from her about the tragedy at Deering Hill.

"I saw in the paper that Mr. Martin Wylde had been convicted, sir. Very sad, it is, too."

She seemed, however, to have no doubt as to his guilt.

"A nice young gentleman gone wrong. But though I wouldn't speak ill of the dead, it was her ladyship what led him on. Wouldn't leave him alone, she wouldn't. Well, they've both got their punishment. There's a text used to hang on my wall when I was a child 'God is not mocked,' and it's very true. I knew something was going to happen that very evening—and sure enough it did."

"How was that?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"I was in my room, sir, changing my dress, and I happened to glance out of the window. There was a train going along, and the white smoke of it rose up in the air, and if you'll believe me it formed itself into the sign of a gigantic hand. A great white hand against the crimson of the sky. The fingers were crooked like, as though they were reaching out for something. It fair gave me a turn. "Did you ever, now?" I said to myself. "That's a sign of something coming"—and sure enough at that very minute I heard the shot. "It's come," I said to myself, and I rushed downstairs and joined Carrie and the others who were in the hall, and we went into the music room and there she was, shot through the head—and the blood and everything. Horrible! I spoke up, I did, and told Sir George how I'd seen the sign beforehand, but he didn't seem to think much of it. An unlucky day, that was; I'd felt it in my bones from early in the morning. Friday, and the 13th—what could you expect?"

She rambled on. Mr. Satterthwaite was patient. Again and again he took her back to the crime, questioning her closely. In the end he was forced to confess defeat. Louisa Bullard had told all she knew, and her story was perfectly simple and straightforward.

Yet he did discover one fact of importance. The new post in Canada had been suggested to her by Mr. Thompson, Sir George's secretary. The wages attached were so large that she was tempted, and accepted the job, although it in-

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volved her leaving England very hurriedly. A Mr. Denman had made all the arrangements at this end and had also warned her not to write to her fellow servants in England, as this might "get her into trouble with the immigration authorities," which statement she had accepted in blind faith.

The amount of the wages, casually mentioned by her, was indeed so large that Mr. Satterthwaite was startled. After some hesitation he made up his mind to approach this Mr. Denman.

He found very little difficulty in inducing Mr. Denman to tell all he knew. The latter had first met Thompson in London, and Thompson had done him a good turn. The secretary had written to him in September saying that for personal reasons Sir George was anxious to get this girl out of England. Could he find a job? A sum of money had been sent to raise the wages to an irresistible figure.

"Usual trouble, I guess," said Mr. Denman, leaning back nonchalantly in his chair. "Seems a nice quiet girl, too."

Mr. Satterthwaite did not agree that this was the usual trouble. Louisa Bullard, he was sure, was not a cast-off fancy of Sir George Barnaby's. For some reason it had been vital to get her out of England. But why? And who was at the bottom of it? Sir George himself, working through Thompson?

Or the latter working on his own initiative, and dragging in his employer's name.

Still pondering over these questions, Mr. Satterthwaite made the return journey. He was despondent —his journey had done no good.

Smarting under a sense of failure, he made his way to the Arlecchino the day after his return. He hardly expected to be successful the first time, but to his satisfaction the familiar figure was sitting at the table in the recess, and the dark face of Mr. Harley Quin smiled a welcome.

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite as he helped himself to a pat of butter, "you sent me on a nice wild goose chase."

Mr. Quinn raised his eyebrows. "I sent you?" he objected. "It was your own idea entirely."

"Whose-ever idea it was, it's not succeeded. Louisa Bullard has nothing to tell."

Thereupon Mr. Satterthwaite related the details of his conversation with the housemaid and then went on to his interview with Mr. Denman. Mr. Quinn listened in silence.

"In one sense, I was justified," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "She was deliberately got out of the way. But why? I can't see it."

"No?" said Mr. Quinn, and his voice was, as ever, provocative.

Mr. Satterthwaite flushed. "I daresay you think I might have questioned her more adroitly. I can assure you that I took her over the

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story again and again. It was not my fault that I did not get what we want."

"Are you sure," said Mr. Quin, "that you did not get what you want?"

Mr. Satterthwaite looked up at him in astonishment, and met that sad, mocking gaze he knew so well.

The little man shook his head, slightly bewildered.

There was a silence, and then Mr. Quin said, with a total change of manner, "You gave me a wonderful picture the other day of all the people in this business. In a few words you made them stand out as clearly as though they were etched. I wish you would do something of that kind for the place—you left that in shadow."

Mr. Satterthwaite was flattered.

"The place? Deering Hill? Well, it's a very ordinary sort of house nowadays. Red brick, you know, and bay windows. Quite hideous outside, but very comfortable inside. Not a very large house. About two acres of ground. They're all much the same, those houses round the links. Built for rich men to live in. The inside of the house is reminiscent of a hotel—the bedrooms are like hotel suites. Baths and hot and cold basins in all the bedrooms and a good many gilded electric light fittings. All wonderfully comfortable, but not very countrylike. You can tell that Deering Vale is only nineteen miles from London."

Mr. Quin listened attentively.

"The train service is bad, I have heard," he remarked.

"Oh? I don't know about that," said Mr. Satterthwaite, warming to his subject. "I was down there for a bit last summer. I found it quite convenient for town. Of course the trains only go every hour. Forty-eight minutes past the hour from Waterloo—up to 10:48."

"And how long does it take to Deering Vale?"

"Just about three quarters of an hour. Twenty-eight minutes past the hour at Deering Vale."

"Of course," said Mr. Quin with a gesture of vexation. "I should have remembered. Miss Dale saw someone off by the 6:28 that evening, didn't she?"

Mr. Satterthwaite did not reply for a minute. His mind had gone back with a rush to his unsolved problem. Presently he said, "I wish you would tell me what you meant just now when you asked me if I was sure I had not got what I wanted?"

It sounded rather complicated, put that way, but Mr. Quin made no pretense of not understanding.

"I just wondered if you weren't being a little too exacting. After all, you found out that Louisa Bullard was deliberately got out of the country. That being so, there must be a reason. And the reason must lie in what she said to you."

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite argumentatively. "What *did* she say? If she'd given evidence at the

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trial, what could she have said?"

"She might have told what she saw," said Mr. Quin.

"What did she see?"

"A sign in the sky."

Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him.

"Are you thinking of *that* nonsense? That superstitious notion of its being the hand of God?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Quin. "For all you and I know it may have been the hand of God."

The other was clearly puzzled at the gravity of his manner.

"Nonsense," he said. "She said herself it was the smoke of the train."

"An up train or a down train, I wonder," murmured Mr. Quin.

"Hardly an up train. They go at ten minutes to the hour. It must have been a down train—the 6:28—no, that won't do. She said the shot came immediately afterward, and we know the shot was fired at twenty minutes past six. The train couldn't have been ten minutes early."

"Hardly, on that line," agreed Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite was staring ahead of him.

"Perhaps a freight train," he murmured. "But surely, if so—"

"There would have been no need to get her out of England. I agree," said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite gazed at him, fascinated.

"The 6:28," he said slowly. "But if so, if the shot was fired then, why did everyone say it was earlier."

"Obvious," said Mr. Quin. "The clocks must have been wrong."

"All of them?" said Mr. Satterthwaite doubtfully. "That's a pretty tall concidence, you know."

"I wasn't thinking of it as a coincidence," said the other. "I was thinking that it was Friday."

"Friday?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"You did tell me, you know, that Sir George always wound the clocks on a Friday afternoon," said Mr. Quin apologetically.

"He put them back ten minutes," said Mr. Satterthwaite, almost in a whisper, so awed was he by the discoveries he was making. "Then he went out to play bridge. I think he must have opened the note from his wife to Martin Wylde that morning—yes, decidedly he opened it. He left his bridge party at 6:30, found Martin's gun standing by the side door, and went in and shot her from behind. Then he went out again, threw the gun into the bushes where it was found later, and was apparently just coming out of the neighbor's gate when someone came running to fetch him. But the telephone—what about the telephone? Ah, yes, I see! He disconnected it so that a summons could not be sent to the police that way—they might have noted the time it was received. And Wylde's story works out now. The real time he left was five and twenty past six. Walking slowly, he would

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reach home about a quarter to seven. Yes, I see it all. Louisa was the only danger with her endless talk about her superstitious fancies. Someone might realize the significance of the train and then—good-bye to that excellent alibi."

"Wonderful," commented Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite turned to him, flushed with success.

"The only thing is—how to proceed now?"

"I should suggest Sylvia Dale," said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite looked doubtful.

"I mentioned to you," he said. "She seemed to me a little—er—stupid."

"She has a father and brothers who will take the necessary steps."

"That is true," said Mr. Satterthwaite, relieved.

A short time afterward he was sitting with the girl, telling her the story. She listened attentively. She put no questions to him but when he had done she rose.

"I must have a taxi—at once."

"My dear child, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Sir George Barnaby."

"Impossible. Absolutely the wrong procedure. Allow me to—"

He twittered on by her side. But he produced no impression. Sylvia Dale was intent on her own plans. She allowed him to go with her in the taxi, but she was deaf to all his remonstrances. She left him in the taxi while she went into Sir George's city office.

It was half an hour later when she came out. She looked exhausted, her fair beauty drooping like a waterless flower. Mr. Satterthwaite received her with concern.

"I've won," she murmured, as she leaned back with half-closed eyes.

"What?" he was startled. "What did you do? What did you say?"

She sat up a little.

"I told him that Louisa Bullard had been to the police with her story. I told him that the police had made inquiries and that he had been seen going into his own grounds and out again, a few minutes after half-past six. I told him that the game was up. He—he went to pieces. I told him that there was still time for him to get away, that the police weren't coming for another hour to arrest him. I told him that if he'd sign a confession that he'd killed Vivien I'd do nothing, but that if he didn't I'd scream and tell the whole building the truth. He was so panicky that he signed the paper without realizing what he was doing."

She thrust it into his hands.

"Take it—take it. You know what to do with it so that they'll set Martin free."

"He actually signed it," cried Mr. Satterthwaite, amazed.

"He is a little stupid, you know," said Sylvia Dale. "So am I," she

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added as an afterthought. "That is why I know how stupid people behave. We get rattled, you know, and then we do the wrong thing and are sorry afterward."

She shivered and Mr. Satterthwaite patted her hand.

"You need something to pull you together," he said. "Come, we are close to a favorite resort of mine—the Arlecchino. Have you ever been there?"

She shook her head.

Mr. Satterthwaite stopped the taxi and took the girl into the little restaurant. He made his way to the table in the recess, his heart beating hopefully.

But the table was empty. Sylvia saw the disappointment in his face.

"What it is?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "That is, I half expected to see a friend of mine here. It doesn't matter. Some day, I expect, I shall see him again."

TV *reminder* . . .

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At the Twelfth Annual Edgar Allan Poe Dinner, held by Mystery Writers of America at Toots Shor's Restaurant, New York City, on April 25, 1958, a new award was inaugurated. Your Editors were given the pleasure and privilege of writing the citation for this new award. Here is what we wrote (unabridged and unedited):

This year, for the first time, we honor one of the Grand Masters in our field, and by the unanimous vote of the Board of Directors of MWA the first recipient of this award is Vincent Starrett. Who among us has a more distinguished record in so many different facets of our work? Vincent Starrett has earned our respect, admiration, and affection as a detective novelist and short story writer; as one of our foremost historians and critics; as a poet and anthologist; as an essayist and columnist who has made a fine art of writing about books and bookmen; as an explorer in bibliography and a discoverer in book collecting; as a Sherlockophile and connoisseur without peer—as, indeed, the noblest gentlemen-and-scholar in our ranks. All honor to his accomplishments and undeviating integrity!

To celebrate Mr. Starrett's award in print, we now offer you one of the Grand Master's finest stories—surely his most charming. Savor it well!

THE TRAGEDY OF PAPA PONSARD

by VINCENT STARRETT

WITHOUT HIS BOOKS PAPA PONsard would have been lost indeed. But he no longer read them. Instead he catalogued them, every day, in his little shop in the Rue St. Jacques, behind the Pantheon and not too far from Notre Dame. It was a sorrowful and delightful task. For what is more delightful than cataloguing one's beloved books, and what is more sorrowful than writing after them a price? However, when one is a bookseller these things must be.

Three steps led downward to the bookshop of Papa Ponsard. Then

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a door opened with a tinkle of bells, and beyond the door was the shop, a bit dim and dusty even at the hour of noon. For rooms, like brains, are dusty things when one is old and eyes are dim with years, and there is perhaps a contagion about it all that even the doctors do not understand. Across the shop three steps led upward to the darker mysteries of chambers beyond.

Papa Ponsard, seated on a high stool behind his high old-fashioned desk, where the light was best, could look through his window and watch the feet of those who passed along the sidewalk. This also he did daily, often for a long time, his quill pen poised above a page in the old ledger in which the cataloguing was going forward. At such times his mild blue eyes were anxious behind their little panes of glass. There was a pair of feet he knew and feared to see. At such times, too, his granddaughter, standing on the highest of the three steps at the rear of the shop, would chide him for his negligence, her own eyes anxious.

"How comes the catalogue along, Grandfather?" she would ask. And then as like as not she would add, "*Fie!* You are looking again for Monsieur Gebhart. He will not come today. Depend upon it, his threat was all the merest stuff and nonsense. He would not dare."

When she had said this, or something very like it, Papa Ponsard would take his eyes away from the feet that passed along the sidewalk and bend his head again above the ledger. He would dip his quill into his inkhorn and write:

Gaboriau (E.). Le Petit Vieux des Batignolles.
Paris: E. Dentu, 1876. Somewhat worn and shabby, but a sound copy of this scarce little book by our first great master of the detective story. Rebound. 3000 fr.

Or perhaps he would write this:

Leblanc (M.). Arsène Lupin, Gentleman-Cambrioleur.
Paris: P. Lafitte, 1907. Vaguely soiled, but in the original wrappers so often missing. The earliest book about this Prince of Thieves, now becoming quite rare. 6000 fr.

And sometimes he would add a little star and an additional line: "*A genuine bargain.*" But indeed they were all bargains, and francs had fallen sadly, in those unhappy days after the second World War.

Yes, without his granddaughter Papa Ponsard would have been lost indeed. It was she who, in the darker chambers behind the shop, prepared his cheese soup and called him to it when the clocks of the city were striking the hour for that delicious repast. It was she who kept his mind away from the feet of Monsieur Gebhart. A pretty girl, and sweet as a princess in a fairy tale.

It had been a number of years

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since Papa Ponsard had issued a catalogue of his books. The difficulty was the printer: he insisted upon being paid. And of the many feet that passed along the sidewalk before the door of Papa Ponsard's shop, there were so few that turned down the little flight of steps and heard (if a pair of feet may be said to hear) the tinkle of the bells above the door, that printers' bills had come to be a memory of the past. Almost a happy memory, if bills *can* be a happy memory. It was a situation not without its discouragement, as Papa Ponsard was obliged to admit; yet one that might after all be corrigible. If, for instance, there were no Monsieur Gebharts to harass and annoy one.

Meanwhile, the cataloguing must go forward. Who could say at what moment an American, loitering in the neighborhood, might drop in and purchase for 30,000 francs his wonderful copy of Voltaire's *Zadig*, so long the pride of Papa Ponsard's heart.

Thirty thousand francs! Curiously, it was the very sum he owed Monsieur Gebhart. A remarkable coincidence, as often he had mentioned to his granddaughter. Yet when the day came, would not his heart fail him? To see his superb *Zadig* leave the window in which for so long it had reposed! To be bereft of *Zadig!* One of only forty copies on gray paper, and bound for a king's mistress! Already his heart had failed him many times at the mere thought of it. Without his *Zadig*, Papa Ponsard would have been lost indeed.

To be sure, there were other old companions in that wonderful window. Passers-by, if they had been interested, might have read some interesting titles. For Papa Ponsard loved not only his Voltaire and his Gaboriau and his Leblanc, but the whole realm of what is lightly called detective literature. He was in his way a scholar; but better still he had been for most of his long life a reader. Now his eyes were tired, but the clandestine celebrity of Monsieur Lecoq and Joseph Rouletabille and more recently, of Inspector Maigret, were part of his tapestry of memory, and the fame of London's Monsieur Sherlock 'Olmès was not unknown to him. With only a little stretch of his neck he could see the titles of some of the books in his window display.

They were a miscellaneous lot designed to catch the popular fancy; but a few "high spots" were there also, for the specialists: an indubitable English first edition of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (London, 1902); an indubitable French first of *Les 13 Coupables* (Fayard, 1932); an indubitable first in translation of *M. Ashenden, Agent Secret* (1930), in the pleasing format of the Editions de France; and that admirable rarity, the *Histoires Extraordinaires* of the admirable Edgar Poe in the translation of Baudelaire. Could he

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orally bring himself to sell them if opportunity offered?

Sometimes young Valentin Nadaud ran in from next door and added his encouragement to the situation; but he looked oftener at Papa Ponsard's granddaughter than at the fabulous *Zadig*. This was not surprising, however, for she was very pleasant to look at; and books, after all, are only books when one is a Valentin Nadaud—even such a treasure as *Zadig*. There were but forty copies of Papa Ponsard's *Zadig* in all the world, as Valentin had often heard; but there was only one of Josephine Joly. She was unique.

Papa Ponsard took his eyes away from the hurrying feet in the Rue St. Jacques and observed that his granddaughter was watching him. She stood as usual on the uppermost of the three steps that led into the chambers beyond. As always he felt abashed. He spoke quickly.

"My darling, I was about to catalogue the glorious *Zadig*. I was upon the very point of taking it from the window."

"That is excellent," she smiled, "and you will just have time, for the cheese soup is almost ready. I was about to warn you."

"It is a magnificent volume," said Papa Ponsard, "and it would grace the catalogue of any bookseller in the city. The price, of course, is ridiculous. It is worth forty thousand francs if it is worth a sou."

"Then why not ask that for it? You who love your books so much must not be too modest when you come to sell. It is no compliment surely to the books."

"Ah, if I might keep it for myself! How happy I should be! I know I shall miss it when it is gone, as I should miss you, Josephine, if you were gone."

"Well, well," she laughed, "we are neither of us gone yet, Grandfather. I, at least, shall not leave you for forty thousand francs or for one hundred thousand."

"You will leave me whenever that young rogue of a Valentin says the word," said Papa Ponsard sadly. "You will leave me for ten francs, or for none."

"I shall never leave you while you need me," said Josephine, "whatever Valentin may say, or anyone else."

"That is my good girl," said Papa Ponsard, "but I should feel easier, my dear, if Monsieur Gebhart had already come and gone and we were safe."

"Safe!" cried his granddaughter. "Safe for another month, Grandfather? That is not safety. But he will not come today. And if he does, what matter? He will go away again, as he has done before. One cannot give what one does not have. His threats are the merest *pouf!* It is only in books that poor people are thrust into the street because they cannot pay their rent. Come now, in a few moments I shall call

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you to come in and enjoy your soup."

"In the newspapers too," said Papa Ponsard. "Every day I read about them. It is a dreadful thing. And all my books! My *Zadig*..."

"It is worth forty thousand francs," said his granddaughter, "and you must not catalogue it for a single franc less. The idea! That glorious book! Remember, then, in a few moments I shall call you."

This conversation, also, had been repeated many times. In all its lines both were letter perfect.

But on this day Papa Ponsard did indeed reach into his window and remove the glorious *Zadig*. He laid it gently before him on his high desk and turned its leaves with loving fingers. He knew it almost by heart—from its title page to its colophon he could have recited its enchanting pages. Not its contents perhaps, but its pages. Upon page 7, for instance, there was the broken letter that occurred only in copies of the right edition. It had been corrected in the later smaller copies for the trade. And at page 40 there was the errata slip so often missing in otherwise perfect copies of the original issue. Oh, it was a superb book!

Papa Ponsard dipped his pen into his inkhorn and wrote:

Voltaire. Zadig, ou, La Destinée. Histoire Orientale.

Nancy: Leseure, 1748. Red morocco, with the original wrappers bound in.

The rare first edition of this charming little introuvable in a binding especially designed by Padeloup for Madame de Pompadour and incorporating her arms. One of forty copies on gray paper with the errata slip so often missing and the broken type face on page 7. A magnificent copy of this rare and desirable volume.

His quill hovered for a moment over the page, and then he wrote courageously: *"40000* fr." In reother little note he added almost confidentially: *"I have seen only one other copy of this book in fourteen years."*

For an instant his heart almost failed him. He had done it at last and his immediate impulse was to strike out all he had written. Could he really see it through? For some minutes he was immovable on his stool. Then his hand stole to the drawer of his desk. He opened the drawer a little way and peered in. Yes, *it* was still there. Not even Josephine had been told of his incredible luck at the last auction he had attended. How long ago! But the packet of old papers had justified his negligible speculation.

He read the first few sentences of the manuscript under his hand, presumably a letter addressed to an Italian officer of police:

It was about the year 1832. One day a young American presented himself at my house with an introduction from his fellow countryman, the famous novelist Fenimore

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Cooper... His name was Edgar Poe. From the outset I realized that I had to deal with a remarkable man. Two or three remarks which he made on my furniture, the things I had about me, the way my articles of everyday use were strewn about the room, and on my moral and intellectual characteristics, impressed me with their accuracy and truth. On the very first day of our acquaintance I freely proffered him my friendship and asked for his... At this time I had a little house all to myself in the Rue de l'Ouest. I offered to let Edgar Poe have two rooms for the duration of his stay in Paris...

The bells over the door tinkled musically and Papa Ponsard looked up with a start. A spasm of fear crossed his face. But it was only young Valentin Nadaud, who had run in from next door to look upon that unique item, Josephine Joly.

"Hello, Papa Ponsard," cried Valentin, and then almost reverently he added, for he had seen the book, *"Mon Dieu!* You are cataloguing the *Zadig!"*

"Good day to you, young man," said Papa Ponsard severely. "And what is it to you, may I ask, if I am cataloguing my *Zadig?"* But he smiled after a moment and continued, "So long as my granddaughter Josephine is not missing from her accustomed place, I imagine you will continue to favor me with your patronage."

"True," said the young man, "true. And how is that charming young woman today? It is all of twenty-four hours since I have seen her."

"I was about to call him to his soup," responded Josephine from the top step, "and I am very well, thank you, very well indeed. You are at liberty to join us if you care to."

"That I am not," said the young man, laughing. "For I have just come from eating my own soup. It was my thought that you would have finished. You are late today, are you not?"

"Just a little. But Grandfather was cataloguing his *Zadig* and I could not interrupt him. We shall be through before long."

"Before long," murmured the old man, climbing down from his perch. "Yes, we shall all be through before long." He peered again for a moment into his open drawer and read:

Poe had one curious idiosyncrasy: he liked the night better than the day. Indeed, his love of darkness amounted almost to a passion. But the Goddess of Night could not always afford him her shade... so he contrived a substitute. As soon as day began to break he hermetically sealed up the windows of his room and lit a number of candles. In the midst of this pale illumination he worked or read, or suffered his thoughts to wander in the insubstantial regions of revery; or else he fell asleep... But as soon as the

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clock told him the real darkness had come he would come in for me and take me out with him . . .

Papa Ponsard shuffled across the room and laid a hand on Valentin's shoulder. "And mind you, Valentin, if Monsieur Gebhart comes while I am out of the shop, you are to say to him that I am— that I am—"

"That he is eating his cheese soup and will return in a few minutes," said Josephine from the doorway. "But he will not come today."

"Trust me," said Valentin. "I shall say and do exactly the right thing, whatever that may be. Perhaps it will occur to me to tickle his ribs with this dagger which I see before me." And he picked up a paper knife of curious design and tried the blunt edge with his thumb.

"Kind Heaven!" cried the old man. "Would you ruin us all?"

"Your cheese soup, Grandfather!" said Josephine firmly. "Valentin is only fooling with you."

Which was true, for Valentin, left alone in the shop, cast aside the stiletto and looked around him for matters of greater interest. He was an impatient young man and he was very much in love. He was really only a boy.

So the *Zadig* was being catalogued at last! How often he had heard it threatened. And what matter, after all, since the catalogue was never to be printed and sent forth? It was merely another indication, another milestone passed, in the tragedy of Papa Ponsard. Just to have reached the point where he was willing to catalogue the book was an adumbration of the end. Poor Papa Ponsard! Valentin felt genuinely sorry for him. But he felt sorrier for Papa Ponsard's granddaughter and sorrier still for himself.

He approached the desk with some curiosity; but it was not the *Zadig* that engaged his attention nor yet the secret manuscript, for Papa had closed the drawer. He read the last scratchy item in the ledger with interest, perhaps with some sense of its pathos. He read it with a little gesture of impatience. The *Zadig* was worth little more than was being asked for it. Valentin had made private inquiry of the matter himself.

Something impish smiled inside him; he plucked the old man's quill from the inkhorn and poised it above the page. With a swift glance toward the top step, the pedestal of his Josephine, he added another cipher to the widely spaced figures that stood beside the description of the book, then hastily laid down the pen.

The price of the delightful *Zadig* stood now at 400000 francs.

Then, as the bells tinkled above the door, Valentin wheeled sharply and looked into the eyes of Monsieur Gebhart, who stood within the aperture. He had really come. What an evil-looking thing a landlord was, to be sure!

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Valentin nervously recited his lesson, "He is eating his cheese soup and will return in a few minutes."

"I shall wait," said Monsieur Gebhart, not unpleasantly; but a moment later his eyes had narrowed and his smile was cold, for he had recognized this hanger-on. For an instant he had thought the old man had been able to afford a clerk. "Young man," said Monsieur Gebhart sternly, "I have seen you here before. You are the suitor for his granddaughter's hand. You know his business. Tell me, is he able to pay?"

"I—I—I am afraid not," replied Valentin sadly.

"And you? You are not prepared to help him?"

"I am sorry," answered Valentin, "but I have nothing." He drew a long breath and continued, "I am sure, Monsieur Gebhart, that all he requires is a little time."

"He has had already more than a little time," said Monsieur Gebhart, "and I have another tenant for the shop. I am sorry for him, of course, and for the girl."

But he did not look particularly sorry, thought Valentin. Suddenly the boy's eyes were on the paper knife. He glanced quickly away. Now was his time—now or never! But he knew at once it would be never. Such things occurred only in books and in the films.

"I am sorry too," said Valentin, and for a fleeting moment his eyes rested again on the stiletto. "And now I think I must run to my own job while it is left to me." He repeated the message, "He is eating his cheese soup and will return in a few minutes."

"I shall wait," said Monsieur Gebhart for the second time.

Then the little bells over the door jingled less happily as Valentin Nadaud hurried back to his place in the shop next door, for he could not bear to wait and see Papa Ponsard and Josephine thrust into the street. He had no doubt that it would happen just that way. He had often seen it in the films, and he had read about it in books.

Monsieur Gebhart, left alone in the shop, wandered idly to the high desk and stood for a moment looking out at the hurrying feet that passed along the sidewalk above. His eyes fell casually on the glorious *Zadig,* paused there for an instant, and looked away again. Monsieur Gebhart was not interested in books. But in the next instant his glance was on the open ledger, and *that* was a book with whose uses he was well acquainted.

His eyes widened behind his horn-rimmed lenses. The last line in the ledger had caught his attention: *"I have seen only one other copy of this book in fourteen years."* Immediately above he saw the hieroglyphic that now read *"400-000 fr."*

"The old rascal!" murmured Monsieur Gebhart incredulously.

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Then for several minutes he thought furiously and with, as it seemed to him, truly remarkable clarity.

It was obvious, of course, that he was being fooled, that he had been fooled for months on end. This cunning old devil Ponsard, pretending poverty, was actually possessed of books of extraordinary value which, no doubt, he was selling at fabulous prices. 400,000 francs! And the debt to him—Anatole Gebhart— his rent —was a beggarly 30,000.

Or was it possible that Papa Ponsard did not know the full value of his own books? It was a new thought and for a moment it staggered Monsieur Gebhart. He considered its possibilities. A book worth 400,000 francs to Papa Ponsard might to another dealer be worth an even larger sum. But even at 400,000 one could not lose—not for a book of which the old devil had not seen another copy in fourteen years! There must be no doubt, mused Monsieur Gebhart, that there were in the world books of astonishing rarity and value. Vaguely he recalled the headlines of the newspapers after an important sale at the auctioneer's. And once there had been a paragraph about an American . . . and a book . . . What was it the fool had paid for a single volume? Perhaps as much as 1,000,000 francs!

With an oath Monsieur Gebhart brought his fist down on the desk so that the ink jumped in the horn. Then a slow smile crossed his face and again his brain functioned with its customary shrewdness. When the door at the top of the steps opened to admit Papa Ponsard, Monsieur Gebhart was seated comfortably in a chair, with crossed knees, in a spot remote from the high desk and the telltale ledger. There was even a kindly smile on his face.

Papa Ponsard, however, was dismayed. *"Mon Dieu!"* he cried. "I knew it! It is Monsieur Gebhart!"

Josephine's face was pale as she came forward. Immediately she began to explain. "We are sorry to have kept you waiting. We thought we heard the bells, Monsieur Gebhart, but we supposed it to be Valentin — Monsieur Nadaud — leaving the shop. And when we heard them again we thought it was Monsieur Nadaud returning."

Monsieur Gebhart was affable and magnanimous. "And no one else ever opens your door and rings your bells?" he questioned them archly.

His pleasantry shocked them. They stared in horror at this new evidence of his wickedness. It was Josephine who answered. "Alas, no one else, Monsieur!"

"That is a great pity," smiled Monsieur Gebhart. "Come then, since my visit has so upset you, let us get to business—since the sooner that is over the sooner I shall depart. I must suppose, Papa Ponsard,

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that you are ready to pay the money that you owe me."

But Papa Ponsard had collapsed into a chair. Suddenly he struggled to his feet. He shuffled toward a nail driven into the wall, upon which hung his incredible hat.

"My coat, Josephine!" he panted. "My best coat, darling. There may still be time."

"Mother of God, Papa Ponsard! What is it that you would do?" cried his granddaughter. "Where is it you would go?"

"To Ricardou, my pet, my good friend Ricardou. He alone can save us now. I shall ask a little loan—just enough to get us by. If he has it, I am sure he will give it to me. Only wait a little, Monsieur Gebhart, and I think I can promise you . . ."

But Monsieur Gebhart interrupted with a cry of "Fiddlesticks!" Then he gripped himself and contrived a little smile. "My dear Papa Ponsard," he said suavely, "surely I have heard you speak of your good friend Ricardou before. Already twice you have been to Ricardou while I waited, and once, unless I am mistaken, you returned with a hundred francs, which *he* had borrowed from a friend of *his*. No, no, let us put aside all thought of Ricardou. Come now, I am not inclined to be harsh, however gruff I may have seemed when I was here before. The fact is, since we last talked together I have become interested in books—in *all* books, I may say. In a small way I have become the strange thing you call, I believe, a collector."

Papa Ponsard's mouth opened and closed without sound; he seemed to have lost his voice.

"Why should it surprise you? Only in a small way, of course. Yes, I think I may now call myself a collector, Papa Ponsard, and it is my fondest wish to own one of the fine volumes you have in your shop. I refer, of course, to your lovely *Zadig*."

"My *Zadig!*"

"The *Zadig!*" cried Josephine, and laid her hand against her breast.

"In the circumstances you must allow me to name my own figure, however," continued Monsieur Gebhart. "You have much to thank me for, Papa Ponsard. You are lucky that you have had a roof over your head these several months past. Very well, then, you owe me thirty thousand francs. I wipe out that debt! I hand you this receipt for it, which I have written here at your desk while you guzzled your cheese soup. There, that is done. But the *Zadig* is mine for three hundred thousand francs."

"Three hundred thousand francs!" Papa Ponsard screamed the words. "You offer me three hundred thousand francs for my *Zadig?*"

Monsieur Gebhart shrugged. "I shall not go a sou higher," he said coldly. "You must take it or leave it."

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It was at this point that Josephine Joly, with what is supposed to be a woman's intuition, reached the conclusion that Monsieur Gebhart had gone mad. However, it was a madness that spelled happiness for herself and Papa Ponsard. She spoke quickly.

"We accept your offer, Monsieur Gebhart," she said. "It is a book he has always valued and naturally he is loath to part with it—but it is yours."

"Then our business is concluded when I have paid you the money," said Monsieur Gebhart. "Fortunately, I have the amount with me. You will, of course, give me a bill of sale for the volume? — signed paid in full."

"Of course," answered Josephine. "I have often made them out for Papa Ponsard. I will give it to you at once."

Papa Ponsard, slumped in his chair, continued to stare blindly at the slip of paper in his hand—a receipt for thirty thousand francs back rental that he had never paid.

When the little bells above the door had jingled happily at the departure of Monsieur Gebhart and the *Zadig* was irrevocably gone, Papa Ponsard tottered to his old desk and peered into its drawer. After a moment he continued to read the manuscript it concealed:

In these nocturnal rambles I could not help remarking with wonder and admiration (although his rich endowment of ideas should have prepared me for it) the extraordinary faculty of analysis exhibited by Edgar Poe. He seemed to delight in giving it play and neglected no opportunity of indulging himself in that pleasure... He would remark with a smile of proud satisfaction that for him man had an open window where his heart was; and as a rule he accompanied that assertion with an immediate demonstration which, having me for its object, could leave no doubt in my mind about Edgar's power of divination...

That was all. What a pity the manuscript was incomplete! At least two pages appeared to be missing. But how fortunate that he had been able to identify the handwriting. That flowing script, that unmistakable manner! The signature was missing, to be sure, but it was photographed upon his mind as if the dashing syllables *Alexandre Dumas* were under his eyes. This was a treasure that no Monsieur Gebhart, no rich American, would ever take from him.

Papa Ponsard returned to his chair. A little helplessly, Josephine too sat down; the strain on her also had been considerable.

There she still sat when Valentin Nadaud entered hurriedly amid a perfect ecstasy of bells.

"He has gone?" asked the boy anxiously. "You are still here?"

"He is gone," answered Josephine, "and we are still here." And she told him what had happened.

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"Mon Dieu!" cried Valentin, understanding. "But when he comes to sell it?"

"It was his own offer," said Josephine sharply. "What do you mean? What are you thinking, Valentin?"

"I am thinking that now you are rich I must wait a little longer," said Valentin sadly.

EDITORS' POSTCRIPT: *Try to find those books today! And at Papa Ponsard's original prices! Ah, the snows of yester-year...*

"Q"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CRAIG RICE**

TITLE: ***The Man Who Swallowed a Horse***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: John J. Malone

LOCALE: Chicago

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An anecdote typical of Craig Rice's off-beat humor . . . Can a man be frightened to death by his psychiatrist?*

"THE MAN WAS KILLED," JOHN J. Malone, the famous criminal lawyer, said, "in a particularly vicious manner. Mr. Duck was scared to death by his psychiatrist."

"Nonsense," Homicide Captain von Flanagan growled. He paused. They looked at the late Mr. Duck, who had just been moved from the operating room. "Where is Dr. Nash, anyway?"

"He's lying down," the white-faced nurse said. "The shock—" she gulped. "Of course we knew Mr. Duck had a bad heart, but no one thought—it was really just a harmless little joke. I mean, it was meant to be one."

She added, "Mrs. Duck is in the doctor's office with him."

The little attorney and von Flanagan took a last glance at the dead Mr. Duck. He had been a portly man with a broad face that had once been red and thick-veined. A small incision had been made in his abdomen, hardly more than a scratch.

"He just suddenly gasped and died," the nurse said. Her eyes narrowed. "Dr. Nash and Mrs. Duck are great friends."

Malone looked her over. A pretty little thing she was, with reddish gold hair and a sweet mouth.

"Let's go into the office," von

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Flanagan said. "Malone, how did you get into this?"

"Mr. Duck was my client," Malone said. "He told me he was going to this psychiatrist his wife recommended. For an operation. Because he'd swallowed a horse."

"Malone," the police officer said sharply, "you've been drinking."

"Mr. Duck was positive he'd swallowed a horse," the little counselor-at-law said stubbornly. He added reminiscently, "I remember once when you thought you had a mouse in your mouth."

Von Flanagan growled and pushed open the door to the office. Dr. Nash was supine on the couch, his handsome face pale. Mrs. Duck sat beside him, holding his hand.

She jumped up, startled, and cried out, "It wasn't anyone's fault."

The doctor said, "Mr. Duck was convinced he had swallowed a horse. We decided to practice a harmless little deception. We put him under anesthesia, made a slight incision, and before he came to, we led a horse into the operating room. Hardly conventional procedure, but—well, I explained to him we'd operated and extracted the horse, and he would be as good as new. Mr. Duck took one look at the horse and—just died."

"It was murder," Malone said. "You knew about his heart—you knew the slightest shock would kill him. And if I'm not mistaken, you and the charming Mrs. Duck have plans for the future."

"Prove it," Mrs. Duck said angrily.

"I can," Malone said. "He told me all about it in a letter . . . all about his ailment and the planned operation. What he didn't know about was the gimmick you had in mind. That was what murdered him."

Later, sitting in Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, von Flanagan growled, "I still think you made it all up."

"Naturally," Malone said, signaling for two more gins. "But it scared Dr. Nash, who isn't such a stable character, into breaking down and telling you the truth. A signed confession, no less. And you pay for the next drink."

"If he changes his mind," the police officer said gloomily, "it's going to be hell selling this story to a jury." He scowled into his glass. "Tell me the truth, Malone, or you pay for the next drink."

"Mr. Duck really did think he'd swallowed a horse," Malone told him. "He really did have a fixation. And he did think that the operation was going to make him as good as new."

"But why did he drop dead the minute he looked at the horse?" von Flanagan demanded.

"Because," Malone said patiently, "the horse in the operating room was a white horse. The horse Mr. Duck thought he'd swallowed was a black one."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ALVIN PEVEHOUSE**
TITLE:	***The Bay of the Dead***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Dean Weathergay
LOCALE:	Guaymas, Mexico
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A fascinating background: an anthropological expedition in the Gulf of Mexico to collect bones and artifacts from Indian graves—including a ring said to have belonged to Cortez himself . . . and the return of that venerable churchman, Father Weathergay.*

St. Bodolph-the-Moor
85 Indian Road
Nogales, Arizona
Friday Evening

Rt. Rev. Horatio D. McPheeters
Bishop of Denver
c/o St. Bartholomew's Parish
Lasso, Wyoming

My dear Bishop:

I write this hurriedly from Reverend Pomeroy's guest room, where he has kindly let me rest before I undertake to continue the arduous bus trip into Mexico to do what I can to save our friend, Dean Weathergay, from his present folly.

Although I am absent from St. Margaret's without permission, I did talk this matter over with Canon Milligan at Presentation Cathedral. We decided that you yourself, if you were not presently isolated from telephones (I suppose people *must* be confirmed in July), would have sent me to rescue the Dean.

It is difficult to tell you where our premonitions began and our fears took over in this matter. But I daresay it was at the very minute Mrs. Fairy Beabout stood up at the Denver Missions Circle meeting in Guild Hall last Wednesday and announced she had a letter from

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the Dean which she wished to read to the ladies.

She reported that he'd sent his warmest regards from his retirement at the Mission of St. Anne de Topolobampo, Mexico, and thanked them for the hand-woven gray muffler which they had sent, as you may know, on his 85th birthday anniversary.

Then she started to read a little list of personal needs with which the Dean thought the ladies might supply him. Well, Sir, I've asked Fairy Beabout a number of times to let me see these lists before they are introduced into a public meeting, but there she was, again reading a list I hadn't seen:

> Twelve pairs of denim trousers for boys eight, ten, and fourteen. (I am returning the underpants you sent last March, as underclothing is not worn by our boys save to Sunday service.)

(You might well envision the cup-clatters of the Guild Ladies at that, Sir.)

> Then, two 30x30 tires for my jeep, and ask the gentleman from whom you purchase them to guarantee that the treads will not come off, as the last ones did.
>
> Fifteen pounds of hard candy.
>
> The book, *Marine Decapod Crustacea,* by Cremola.
>
> And last, a very special favor . . .

(I may say, Sir, that these words were enough to bring me to the edge of my chair, truly concerned.)

> . . . Will you please send a bank draft for $54.00 to Mr. Eric Chutney, Seaside Fishery Company, San Diego, California, for four (4) cases of dynamite and caps, which I assure you will be necessary in the undertaking of a project dear to my heart.
>
> Tell him, please, that I have found an old detonator among my plunder at the mission and will not need one from him.
>
> Further, if you would be so good, tell him that we will meet him as planned at the pension in Guaymas, where I myself plan to be, no later than Friday next, and that our plans for blowing up the entrance to the church have been endorsed enthusiastically by our partners in the project.

Well, Sir, I could scarce contain myself through the reading of the rest of the letter, much less the concluding portion of the meeting. Swiftly as propriety would permit, I engaged the Canon's attention in the matter and thereupon proceeded to obtain the documents which seem to be requisite for a journey past our borders.

As you see, I have come as far as Nogales, where Reverend Pomeroy kindly suggested I wire ahead to the Hotel Corazon for accommodations in Guaymas (you may wish to contact me there, Sir); and as a precautionary measure, I also advised the Dean by wire of my

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imminent arrival *without* $54.00 and/or dynamite!

Your Obedient and Faithful
Curate of St. Margaret's,
Matthew Struthers.

Hotel Corazon de Mexico
Guaymas, Sonora
Saturday Morning

My dear Bishop:

Yesterday, aboard a bus full of rattles, poultry, and oil fumes, I crossed the desert of Upper Mexico and arrived in this port city on the Gulf of California. It is dreadfully hot and I do not see how the Reverend Dean survives the dust.

I saw nothing to distract me from my distress re: the Dean. On the whole long trip from Nogales, the July road is an endless waste of dying butter trees and cactus, of scrawny cattle, of now and again a homeless burro; and always, it would seem, the ominous circling of vultures. Occasionally we passed the treeless yard of an adobe hut or one of the depressing little crosses erected by the Mexicans on the right-of-way, where some poor fellow had been killed. (Which reminds me, Sir: I hope and presume I have your authority to *forbid* the Dean to detonate explosives, much less damage an ecclesiastical edifice. It would be good of you to write me to that effect here at the hotel, so that my reproof to the Dean may be, as one might say, properly authenticated.)

On arriving here early yesterday, I discovered a note from the Dean waiting for me at the desk of the Hotel Corazon. He had received my telegram and informed me he would meet with me at the *Policia.* (You see, Sir, how quickly one assimilates the language.)

Tired as I was, I dropped my baggage in the cool and inviting room that awaited me, and rushed off.

The small police station sits next the high blue-and-white Mariners' Headquarters, both buildings facing the quay, or *marina,* as they call it here. An underling in khaki sleeves put out his hand for, I presumed, my papers. However, when I saw him poring over my vaccination certificate upside down, I despaired of conveying to him my desire to see someone in charge who might know Dean Sam Weathergay. The fellow obviously did not understand English.

Still, I tried. He looked blank. Just as I had resolved to return the long three blocks to the hotel for an interpreter, I felt a tug at my trousers and looked down to see a dark young man on his knees beside me, a scrub-brush in his hand. He was dirty and barefoot, in blue jeans and T-shirt splotched with water—obviously an inmate. I quickly moved out of his reach.

"Father," he said in English, "I can help you. I know where Dean Sam is."

"Where? Why isn't he at the hotel?" I demanded.

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The policeman entered into a spirited argument with the youth that my poor grasp of the language would not allow me to follow.

At that moment a frosted glass door opened and an immaculately uniformed, very tall dark man with clean fingernails and a small mustache appeared.

In excellent English this official announced "I am Captain Adan Martinez, Commandant of the Guaymas police district. Can I help you?"

I introduced myself and at the Captain's invitation went into his private office. The young native, scrub-brush still in hand, followed us.

"My dear Captain," I said as soon as I was seated, "the Reverend Dean is inclined to great enthusiasms." (Here the Captain, who apparently knows our dear Dean well, Sir, smiled and looked down at his manicured nails.) "I am concerned that, at his advanced age, his health may be injured by this ... expedition, or whatever it is he is planning. I am here to prevent it. Is this young man involved?"

"In the case of Innocencio Valdez," the Captain said, eying the young man coldly, "I am faced with a perhaps international murder plot."

Innocencio leaped forward. "Don't believe what he says. Dean Sam will tell you, Father. It is only a little thieving and I did not do it. No one is dead. This Captain must do his best to make a big case ..."

"Silencia!" the Captain growled. "Excuse me, Senor, *Una cosa a una tiempo."*

Well, Sir, knowing the Dean's penchant for migrating toward violence, I was alarmed. "Someone is dead?" I asked.

"Permit me to tell you," Captain Martinez said, scowling at Innocencio. "Early this summer Dr. Leah Miller, who is Professor of Anthropology at Presidio University in your California, chartered a fishing boat, the *Amigo Mio,* and came to the West Coast of Mexico with a permit from my government to collect bones and artifacts from Indian graves. She brought with her two of her students, a Mr. John Cowden and a Miss Stacey Ann Smith, who formed the crew.

"Your Dean Weathergay had heard rumors of a cave-church which is supposed to lie a short distance from Guaymas at the Bay of the Dead. The entrance reputedly is covered with an earth-slide which Dr. Miller and Father Weathergay proposed to blast away."

(You may imagine my relief, Sir, at discovering that the Dean's venture did not involve, as I had feared, desecration of a sacred edifice!)

"Have they, then," I asked, "unearthed this cave-church?"

"No, but your Dean is enchanted by the old fiction of the Holy Virgin of the Golden Almond, and—"

"Fiction!" young Innocencio

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shouted (these Latins are quite emotional). "The *Virgen del Almagordo Oro,* it is there, and Father Sam knows it! We would have it this very day in the *capella* of St. Anne in Topolobampo if no one had fell into love!"

The Captain shrugged and spread his immaculate hands. "Whatever may be the truth about this alleged Virgin, Dr. Miller had collected her boatload of bones and broken pots. The buried church here in Guaymas was to be her last exploration before return to the States.

"After the *Amigo Mio* put in at Topolobampo, where Dr. Miller had met Dean Weathergay, they had agreed that the *Amigo Mio* would sail north to Guaymas. Dean Weathergay drove up the coast by jeep with his own party, planning to meet Dr. Miller and her two students here and to pick up some equipment."

I turned at once to the young prisoner.

"But there was a motor accident?" I could no longer contain myself. You well know, Sir, what a risk is involved when the Dean drives.

"No, no!" Innocencio protested. "I did not drive the jip at all. Dean Sam sent me on the *Amigo Mio* to help the crews."

"This is but his claim," the Captain said mildly. "When in fact I have no doubt Innocencio Valdez insinuated himself upon the expedition. Why, you ask?" His eyes narrowed and a knowing smile spread to the ends of his mustache. "The student, John Cowden, had found a valuable ring—a ring said to have belonged to no less than Cortez. This conniving one determined to have it at any cost. He professed a friendship with Mr. Cowden, whom he then robbed and killed."

My word!

There followed an exchange so vituperative that I was actually pleased not to have a command of the language. It gave me an opportunity to determine that I must find the Dean and spirit him off before this bold young rascal should somehow inveigle himself into Father Weathergay's good graces again and beg to be hidden, a thief and a murderer, under the old gentleman's protective wing.

As if in answer to my thoughts, Innocencio turned an appealingly sorrowful gaze on me and said,

"I did not steal the ring, I swear, Father."

"But you had it in your possession, I take it?" I said sternly.

"Johnny Cowden gave it to me. I swear it. He gave it to me to give to Dean Sam!"

The Captain smiled again. "A lie," he said. "I will tell you, if you permit—"

"I will tell him!" the young man screamed. "It was too much love, Father! Love all the times on the *Amigo Mio!* This is what made the trouble, but nothing has hap-

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pened to Señor Cowden except he flees from love! He is alive!"

I raised my hand imperiously to quiet him and bade the Captain explain.

"Last evening," the police official said, "Miss Smith was not feeling well. The *Amigo Mio* was anchored out in the Bay of the Dead, and Mr. Cowden agreed to take the young lady ashore in the ship's dinghy. She went to the Hotel Corazon to rest the night and see a doctor in the morning. Innocencio was asked to go along, so that he could return Mr. Cowden to the ship and then take the dinghy back to port for Miss Smith's return next day.

"But, Father," he said, "Innocencio did not take John Cowden back to the ship. They went to the wharf, argued, and that is the last anyone has seen of the American student."

"We did not argue!"

"Over the ring," the Captain nodded, as though he had been supported in this explication. "You see, Cowden knew the Dean had already arrived and was at a pension not three blocks away from the Hotel Corazon; he would scarcely have given the ring to Innocencio to deliver to the Dean at some later date, would he?"

The young man saw us both staring at him. He bent his head and absently stroked the palm of his hand with the scrub-brush. "Johnny Cowden tells me, 'Take this ring to Dean Sam after you leave me at the *Amigo Mio.*' That is all I know, Father; it is true."

"Well, Captain," I offered, "perhaps it is as he says; it is not unbelievable that an earnest student should be moved to safeguard a relic by sending it to such a venerable person as the Dean."

"But consider, Father Struthers," the Captain interjected, "this was an engagement ring. Cowden was going to marry Dr. Miller."

"He was, he was not, he was!" Innocencio said. "I tell you, Father, this Johnny Cowden was with everyone in love too much. I am in disgust greatly all the time I am on the boat. Miss Stacey Ann Smith, she was in love with Señor Cowden, and *la professora* she is become his fiancée, and he has two to love and one ring only to give!"

"Father Struthers," Captain Martinez said, scooting his chair back impatiently, "I put it to you: we have witnesses who saw this Innocencio arguing with Mr. Cowden in front of the *Gallo Caliente* bar, saw them set off in the dinghy together, headed toward the Bay of the Dead. My staff have checked all roads, even the mountain trails, have inquired of all outlanders. Mr. Cowden did not arrive at the *Amigo Mio,* nor leave the city; and he is not here. It is not easy to lose a whole man, even in a port the size of Guaymas.

"I am sorry, sir, that your Dean Weathergay has permitted himself to trust and to take into his care

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a ruthless young killer who discredits our country in the eyes of foreigners."

The Captain rapped on his desk and the shirt-sleeved underling came in to remove Innocencio. Since the Captain remained standing, I too took my leave.

The morning had grown warm and the little cafés in the park that fronts the *marina* were putting up their shutters for the *siesta* which they take at eleven o'clock. The Captain had graciously told me the way to the pension where the Dean and his ménage were quartered. But as I passed the *Aduana Marina* (a kind of home for sailors), I saw that unmistakable white head and ascetic old body in the lobby window. It was indeed the Dean himself, amicably talking to three sailors, as though the whole police force of the town were not hatching up evidence of murder twenty yards away. I went in immediately.

Can you imagine, Sir? After all my concern, and all my help in the affair of the lost Kachina doll in Denver, he calmly remarked to the assembled sailors,

"And here is Struthers with some American cigarettes."

"My dear Dean," I said rather acidly, "I not only did not bring your cigarettes, I did not bring tires *or* explosives."

"So I gathered from your wire," he said. "Ah, Struthers, it is not to be wondered. But no matter. It is impossible to look for the *Virgin of the Golden Almond* now, and the dynamite would be useless to me. But it is good to see you. You never change."

The Dean, his face suddenly grave and anxious, turned back to the sailors and in a rapid-fire Spanish interchange seemed to convince them, or they him, of some matter of great consequence. It occurred to me that these were the men who possibly saw Innocencio and Mr. Cowden in their quarrel before the *Gallo Caliente,* and I broke in.

"Did these fellows hear them discuss the ring?"

"I see you have talked with the good Captain." The Dean's shoulders drooped. "I'm afraid they don't know what the argument was about. They speak no English at all."

My dear Bishop, the Dean looked so old, so fleshless, so disturbed, that for a moment I forgot what mischief his venerable old body usually got him into.

"We may as well go to my place for lunch, Struthers. There's really nothing to be learned here."

But as we went out into the deserted street, he turned to me, his eyes bright again, almost merry:

"When two men speak angrily in a foreign language, Struthers, we need not assume they are angry with each other!"

And we walked along the *marina* toward the high crumbling spires of San Diego Cathedral, upon

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which the Dean's pension fronted.

"I know you are concerned by these events involving a ward of yours, Sir," I said to him.

"Concerned? More than you know, Struthers. It's good to have you here to help. I must say, though, you'll have to take that dog-collar off. They're illegal down here, you know."

"Yes, Sir!" I said, my misgivings about the country growing. I had not been out of clericals since my ordination. "But Sir," I said, thinking to cheer him, "Innocencio seems like an earnest young man, and he makes a good case for Cowden's having simply left by some unknown means of transportation, to return to the States."

The Dean turned his bright blue eyes on me, his white hair blowing over the top of his eyebrows.

"It's murder, Struthers, make no mistake."

Across from the Cathedral leaned a grim two-story building with iron bars across the windows, like a jail, and a medieval doorway that looked big enough to pull a hay-wagon through; this turned out to be our destination.

Four small boys ran out of the big door of the pension. The Dean rummaged in his pockets and brought out sticky, burnt-sugar candies for them. But he seemed little inclined to talk. Luncheon was served by his ample and beaming cook from the Mission. The Dean seated himself and tore the wrapping from the book, *Marine Decapod Crustacea,* which I had brought him. Thus, smoking, he sat absorbed.

Just before we were to sit down at table, a taxi of the town deposited Miss Stacey Ann Smith at the pension. She was a beautiful, frightened, and, I think, Sir, shy girl. We all had lunch together—the Dean, Miss Smith, the four small boys, and I. The children, I must say, were uniformly well-behaved; they ate with gusto and kept their dark eyes fondly on the old man.

But he was intent on Miss Smith. "You have studied with the professor for some time?"

"No, not for very long. I had only two courses with her before joining this expedition."

The Dean helped her to turtle. "Rather unusual, isn't it, Miss Smith, for a woman of Dr. Miller's stature in the field of anthropology to take a beginner in the profession on such an extended expedition?"

The shy girl said, "I paid half the expenses of the boat."

"Ah, I see," the Dean said. (Besides the turtle, done up with avocados, hot peppers—and chocolate sauce, Sir!—there were fried eggs, tortillas, and beans over a little flambeau. Truly, Sir, I am writing this in the middle of the night because of my blighted digestion.) "And what did Mr. Cowden contribute to this expedition?"

"Well, we had to have a sailor, and Johnny knew something about

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boats. Also, he'd taken his bachelor's degree under Dr. Miller." She studied her slender, graceful hand. "Dr. Miller manages a shovel and crowbar quite expertly. But there was a great deal of digging to be done, you know, for bones and artifacts; John was kept busy."

Then, unaccountably, Sir, the girl pushed back her plate, bent her head, and began to cry.

"You found the work arrangement disagreeable, then?" the Dean asked delicately.

"He was engaged to her." She looked up dumbly at him. "I didn't know that until last night."

The Dean cleared his throat and excused the children, telling them they could have their *dulce* in the kitchen.

"He told me he loved me. That he wanted to marry me and was going to tell the doctor so when he got back to the *Amigo Mio* last night. That's what he said . . . But they won't find out anything from the doctor. She's almost pathologically secretive. *We* weren't allowed to touch the lockers with the collections. Everything acquired on the trip belongs to her. And she became very jealous of John. But I don't think she loved him, Father Weathergay."

The girl's reddened eyes took on a hard look. "She would have done anything for that ring. It was the most important find on the trip, and it belonged to John. He intended to give it to me."

"But the ring was found on Innocencio Valdez," I put in, though I would have preferred to remove myself, not merely from the conversation, but from the table. The turtle, it was already evident, had been a mistake.

Miss Smith did not reply to me; instead, she looked (rather angrily, I thought) at the Dean.

"You may not know Innocencio Valdez as well as you think, Father! He hopped to every command of Dr. Miller's. You must face the fact that his knife has not been found."

"His knife?" The Dean's face became very grave, my dear Bishop. I thought for a moment that I must try to persuade him to lie down. "But Innocencio was reared in a fishing village, Miss Smith. He has not been without a fish knife since he was four years old. Even these children carry their fish knives, much as American children carry—ah—cigarette lighters."

Miss Smith's eyes glittered. "He told Captain Martinez that Dr. Miller had admired it, so he had given it to her. But if it's so important to have one's own knife, Innocencio's story sounds a little unconvincing, doesn't it?"

"A boy here does not give his fish knife away," the Dean admitted. "But there is another, and a pleasant custom: one does not refuse to make a gift of that which another admires."

"I wish that cleared your young

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man," Miss Smith said curtly, straightening the neck of her dress. "But his story seems awfully suspicious to me."

The Dean set his coffee cup down abruptly. "You are all under suspicion, Miss Smith. For the ring may indeed be the ring of Cortez and therefore of inestimable value. Dr. Miller believes this; Mr. Cowden believes this; and Mr. Cowden told you."

"He certainly did," she said calmly. "I believe the Mexican or Dr. Miller did something terrible to John. Well, he gave me the ring, and I intend to keep it!"

"But I have it now," the Dean said.

"He gave it to me!" Miss Smith repeated, her eyes flashing.

"Perhaps we can find Mr. Cowden and settle this."

"I don't believe John will ever be found!"

At this moment the cook came in, wiping her hands on her great circles of skirt, to announce that Señor Capitan Adan Martinez had unexpectedly arrived.

The Captain made his exquisite apologies for coming during the Dean's luncheon hour.

"My dear Dean," he said, "you must realize that the best of men make mistaken judgments in character. I have ordered for the *Amigo Mio* to be searched again. I have even, my friend, sent divers to look for a body in the Bay of the Dead where the boat is anchored. There is no trace of Mr. Cowden, and there is no trace of the knife which Innocencio claims to have left on the boat with the doctor. I have questioned the Señora Doctor concerning the knife; she denies it was given to her. Also the professor she says John Cowden never came back to the *Amigo Mio* last night.

"Though I have not been able to shake his story, my reverend friend, the case looks bad against Innocencio Valdez."

The Dean chain-lit a cigarette from the one he was smoking, and I thought I detected a tremor in the old man's hand.

"Captain Martinez," I burst out, "it is highly possible, is it not, that the doctor has lied? That she *did* have the knife, and that Mr. Cowden *did* go aboard the ship last night?"

"Where is the body?" he asked, shrugging. "Where is the knife?"

The Dean nodded, his face grim. "It looks bad indeed. Tell me, Captain, did Dr. Miller come ashore with you?"

"She refuses to quit the boat. She says she will not leave the objects of her search unguarded. Though from what I saw, they would have little value to any but another scientist."

The Dean rose. I was about to suggest some rest for the aged man, when he himself proposed that the party go to the balcony for the air.

"I'm afraid I must make my

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excuses," the Captain said, rising and bowing. "There is much to be done."

"Where, Captain," I asked, "do you think the crime took place?"

"We believe Innocencio took Mr. Cowden to the vacant shores of the *Bampo de los Muertos,* which is to say, the Bay of the Dead, under some pretext of examining the reputed site of the old church of the *Virgen de los Almogordo Oro,* and that he killed him in the sand dunes that line the bay. This could easily have been done, for, as you may have heard, no one will live on the shores of that bay."

The Dean stood, supporting himself on the back of his chair. "Could we perhaps talk with the *señora* on the boat?"

"She will not come ashore," the Captain said.

"Then we must go to her. There is a discrepancy about the knife. All of us—Miss Smith . . ."

"I shall never set foot on that boat again," Miss Smith said heatedly. "Because Innocencio did not do this alone. Oh, no! I don't understand what's happened," she looked first at the Dean, then at the Captain, her eyes round with both fear and a kind of rage. "But I won't go near that awful woman as long as I live!"

The Dean, who had started to move toward the door of the dining room, paused. "But, Miss Smith, we may be able to clear this up for good, and establish that the ring belongs to you. Captain, we shall want Innocencio's presence."

"I should dislike taking along a prisoner . . ."

"But no charges have been filed?"

"No."

"Then let us meet at the police building at, say, five this evening. Miss Smith?"

For a moment I thought the young lady would refuse again. But then she tossed her head and said, "All right. I'll be there."

The Captain drew her chair away from the table. "May I take you to your hotel, señorita?" he asked. They left the pension together.

The Dean and I climbed the stair to the balcony where he could get a breath of air among the birds and ferns, for the day had grown intolerably warm.

My dear Bishop, I do not know why the Dean is not satisfied to retire to the life of prayer and rest which he has earned by his many years of excellent service both as Dean of the Cathedral and pastor, these past ten years, of St. Anne's Mission here in Mexico. But I could see from his distraught face that he was seriously concerned. The possibility that his ward had committed a foul murder for possession of a piece of jewelry shook the Dean's lifelong belief in mankind.

He sat in the cooling shade without speaking. The cook brought more coffee (the old gentleman consumes an unbelievable amount).

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I was well-advanced in discomfort because of the lunch, and the sight of the coffee did not improve matters. It was that strange blue color that some ladies manage when intending to dye their hair black.

The Dean, sitting beside a wicker table in his old house cassock (we are permitted to wear clerical dress *indoors,* you will be glad to hear), drank his blue coffee and watched his orphaned children at play in the large yard behind the hotel. Suddenly his face began to clear. He peered down at the children, seeming to draw strength from their excited voices, then bent close to the rail of the balcony.

"Talk very quietly," he said. "We don't want to spoil their game."

I moved to where I could lean over the balcony and see what was going on below.

Three small urchins with a tin can tied to a string were hiding behind a bush. Out from the bush ran a rope, the end of which was fashioned into a kind of lariat. Inside the circle of the lariat, on the ground, lay a piece of raw meat. The children waited behind the bush, shushing one another, with a good deal of impatience.

"What in the world are they trying to do?" I asked.

"They're going to catch a vulture!" the Dean said spiritedly. I was happy, dear Bishop McPheeters, to see his mind at least temporarily relieved of the concern he felt for his condemned felon in the Guaymas jail. I looked up and saw several of the large, hooded birds circling overhead.

"But why?" I asked.

"They hate vultures. All people do."

At that moment one of the birds, as large as the smallest of the boys, landed to appropriate the meat. One of the boys jerked the lariat. The claws of the vulture were suddenly fast in the noose. The children rushed out of their hiding place, threw what looked like a huge, dirty gray muffler over the bird, and held him down.

"What a horrible game," I said, indignant at this cruelty. "Why don't you stop them?"

"Admittedly, it is not pleasant," the Dean said. "But you can't just stop children, you know, Struthers. You've got to give them something better to do."

"Will they kill the bird?"

"No," he said. "They'll tie that tin can to his feet and let him go. After a while the bird will work itself free of the can. But we must decide first what their game does for them before we can find a satisfactory substitute, mustn't we? They are at it a good deal."

"What do you suggest?"

"Cars," the Dean said. "It's too bad our Mexican youngsters, like their cousins to the North, can't take their energies out in driving cars, instead of being cruel to animals. But we just can't afford that much machinery down here."

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Sir, I think he was pulling my leg. However, before the youngsters could get the tin can secured to the bird's talon, the Dean had called to them. They released their quarry instantly and rushed up the stair, bringing the muffler and rope.

To me he said, "I shall provide them with a game, Struthers," and he turned to the solemn-faced children to point toward the nearby hills and explain something to them in Spanish.

They nodded cheerfully and ran off. Soon I saw them down on the quay, lugging what looked like a large bird cage and other equipment. They headed toward the distant high dunes that surround the Bay of the Dead.

Since the Dean seemed in much better spirits, I prepared to leave him. "I do not believe your turtle agreed with me, Sir," I said.

"Perhaps you have a touch of Montezuma's toothache, as we say here," he said. "Dysentery."

"Then indeed I must rush back to the hotel, Dean Weathergay," I said, "for I came prepared for just such an eventuality."

"Nonsense, Struthers. Don't poison your system with those patent medicines. Strawberry pop and burned toast. That's what we all use down here."

I did take leave of the Dean after promising him I would meet him at the police station at five o'clock. But I had a wretched afternoon, Sir, with fever coming on me and terrible abdominal cramps. I called the room clerk up to my bedside and asked what more could be done. I was advised to take strawberry pop and burned toast, and to cool off in the shower. Can you imagine, Sir?

By five o'clock, however, my fever was down, and I was able to go to the police station. The rest of the party were already gathered on the quay before the building.

Besides the Captain, there were the Dean, who was carrying the book I had brought him; Innocencio; and Miss Smith, who informed me that she intended to institute legal procedures to recover the ring.

The Dean seemed to want to delay our departure. He kept looking up the quay, anxiously. Whomever he looked for did not appear.

But he was good enough to remember my indisposition, and he ascertained from an underling of the Captain's that there were comfort facilities (prudently called a *retrete*) aboard the police boat.

The sky was orange over the hills of Guaymas as we moved down the concrete steps of the quay toward the white police boat. Several men were setting up music stands in the two pavilions, one at either end of the waterfront, and naked children were swimming near the pier. No one among our party of five seemed inclined to speak. The Dean, in his characteristic charity, leaned upon the arm of Innocencio.

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But before we had all stepped aboard, I became aware of the Dean's steady gaze on a group of children who had stationed themselves near the boat. They had the great bird cage he had had them fetch, and it was covered with muslin cloth. The Dean raised his voice in rapid Spanish. They nodded vigorously and proferred the bird cage.

At that moment, Sir, one of the Dean's youngsters, naked as the day he entered this mortal state, scrambled up over the cement pier; he had enough modesty to try to put on his trousers and conceal his wet self behind his companions.

Innocencio raised his voice, "Pepe, you swim in the dirty water! Maria shall beat your little fundament good for that." (I suspect, Sir, this was an expression he picked up from our Dean.) *"Andale a su casa,"* Innocencio yelled at them. The little tribe moved off, but they had gone only a few paces when the Captain raised his hand.

"What is it you have in your back pocket, my son?" he asked the little swimmer.

I could plainly see the blades of two knives hanging through a hole in the rear of the youngster's blue jeans.

"Andale! Andale pia," Innocencio yelled, and all four of the children broke into a race down the street. But the Dean's calm voice cut through the clatter, calling them back.

They did not return at once, but stopped a distance from us—the distance between a lectern and pulpit, I would say—and clustered about the swimmer.

"It is all right, Father," Innocencio said quickly. "It is time they go home."

The old Dean walked over to sit down on one of the benches that line the embarcadero at Guaymas, and looked at the boys. Without a word he raised his hand and they came plodding, like world-weary old men, to the bench, the eldest of them lagging with his tall bird cage.

The Captain said nothing. He was watching all of this interestedly as he sauntered up near the Dean.

"Tell the Captain where you have been," the Dean said.

The boy looked down at the encrusted dirt and under his toenails.

"Where?" the Dean asked.

"To the sand. Above the *Bampo*."

"Which *Bampo?*"

"The *Muertes*. Where the church is hidden under the mountain."

"And what were you doing there?" the Dean asked.

"Catching birds," the boy said. "As you told us."

"Now, where did you get that fish knife?"

The boy put his hand on his back pocket. "It is my own I have, Father. You wish to see it?"

"The other one," the Dean prodded gently. "Where did you get the *big* fish knife?"

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"We found it on the sand among the sea gulls, *Padre.*"

"Above the *Bampo de los Muertos?*"

"Yes, Sir."

"And why were you taking home a knife that does not belong to you?"

"To give it to Innocencio when he is let out of prison. It is his."

The Captain turned to the Dean. Much of the hauteur of his appearance and voice was gone. I thought I heard deep pity in his tone and, truly, Sir, I felt it myself. "I see little point, my good Dean, in our going now to the *Amigo Mio.* From this little angel has come the instrument of truth. You have said there is no evidence of crime. But my good Dean, Mr. Cowden is not on the *Amigo Mio,* nor in the water under it.

"We will find him stabbed and buried in the lonely sands of the Bay of the Dead. And we will find him, if I must turn up every dune on that cursed bay."

Innocencio suddenly raised his head. "Someone is trying to make me guilty of something I did not do against Mr. Cowden, who is my friend. I did not do..."

"Why were you trying to send the children home before we discovered your knife?" the Captain asked. "Further to cover your crime?"

"No. I didn't do anything."

The Dean rose from the bench, took the bird cage from the child, and handed it to me.

"We can do no harm by going out to the boat," he said to the Captain. "And if you are right, you will have but strengthened your case."

We all went aboard the harbor police boat and it made its way through Guaymas Bay, which was filled with ore ships, summer cruise boats from North American ports, a Naval training schooner, and other vessels. Forty minutes later we rounded a jutting arm of land and came into a perfectly clear, blue, almost unrippled bay. This was the Bay of the Dead, the *Bampo de los Muertos,* and I suppose it gets its name from the fact that along its semicircle of shore not a tree or house or sign of human habitation exists. In the center of the bay, about three miles offshore, the *Amigo Mio* — an overly large fishing boat—rode at anchor. We made directly for it.

The woman who greeted us on board must have been only an inch or two less than six feet tall. She was statuesquely beautiful, Sir, or had been at one time, for I would say she was nearing forty, which would make her at least fifteen years older than the vanished Mr. Cowden.

She was sitting quietly in a canvas-backed deckchair near a dip net that sagged over the rail. Dr. Leah Miller had her emotions well in hand, however deep they might be.

She pretended not to notice Miss Smith. In a deep contralto she said to the Dean, "I hope you do not

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believe these foolish tales about Innocencio?"

The Dean said, "I do not, Dr. Miller."

"I don't know how Innocencio came by Johnny's ring, but even if he's hiding something, I'm sure it had nothing to do with Johnny's disappearance. Johnny Cowden is flighty. He probably decided suddenly to take off for the States."

The Captain motioned all of us to sit down in the folding chairs which two of his men had opened for us on the deck. He himself sat down and said, in the matter-of-fact voice of a diagnostician.

"Mr. Cowden did not leave, Dr. Miller. There is not only the ring, but he also neglected to take his clothes and his tourist card. I shall have his body from the sands out there," he swept the bay with his hand, "before morning."

"You are sure," the Dean asked, also addressing the lady-anthropologist, "you did not see the dinghy come alongside this boat last night?"

"I heard nothing at all." Dr. Miller's black eyes were exhausted with grief, her black hair tangled, as if, her beloved having fled, appearance no longer mattered.

Miss Smith sniffed contemptuously and leaned back in her chair. On the gentle evening breeze off the bay an odor, almost pleasant, blew across the deck, a strange odor lacking the fish and flotsam smell of the sea.

"Dr. Miller," the Dean said, "I believe you were engaged to marry Mr. Cowden?"

"Yes. He was to return to the boat last night to give me the Cortez ring as an engagement pledge."

Miss Smith jumped up. "That's not true! He came back here last night to tell you he was finished with you. He was going to give me the ring, and we were to be married."

The Captain motioned her to resume her seat. Dr. Miller just turned away in disgust.

"I think you will agree," the Captain said to the Dean with an irritable shrug, "that we will not find the truth until we find the body."

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I quite agree." The aged Dean rose and stood firm on the swaying deck. "If you will have one of your men gather up the sundry things I brought along in the police boat, Captain, I believe we can set about to do both."

Everyone aboard stared uncomprehendingly at the strange assortment Dean Weathergay took from the deckhand. I for one could make nothing of them, Sir; indeed, I feared this semi-tropic clime had done its insidious work on the old man. There was no rational way to account for a dead fish (this is the very truth, Sir!), a captive sea gull in the huge cage, a small rock, a coil of line, and—this last produced by the puzzled Captain—Innocencio's knife.

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I glanced at Innocencio, but he seemed as perplexed as we were.

We all sat in silent fascination and watched the Dean hand the rock to the Captain, and the knife.

"Would you say these weigh the same, Captain?"

The policeman hefted the two, and nodded. Frowning, he held them both out to the Dean, who took back only the rock. The Dean then addressed the deckhand who held the bird cage, ordering him in Spanish to remove the gull from the cage, I gathered; together they quieted the bird and with a piece of the cord, attached the rock to its feet.

All at once the shrieking bird leaped from the Dean's hand in an explosion of feathers, and quite as suddenly became a serene and soaring thing high above our heads. It circled once and then flew an undeviating course toward the sand dunes of the bay.

At this moment, astonishingly, Dr. Miller stood up and with brisk authority ordered everyone off her boat. She said she was outside the three-mile limit and she demanded that the American consul be sent out to speak with her.

"I know your grief is inconsolable, Dr. Miller," the Dean said blandly. "But since we have just demonstrated how Innocencio's knife could have found its way to the shore, perhaps the Captain will allow us to ascertain, if we can, the whereabouts of Mr. Cowden."

"Olé!" Innocencio burst out. A stern glance from the Dean silenced him.

The Captain asked if this further inquiry would take much time. He pointed out that the sun had already begun to purple on the placid waters and he had no wish to keep us all past nightfall.

"Half an hour, if you will grant it, Captain," the Dean promised; and attaching the dead fish to the rest of the line he dropped it over the side. Perplexed as I was, Sir, I had a premonition that we were, *misere dictu,* fishing for another turtle. But the statement which the Dean made as he turned from gazing overside brought me up short:

"Both Miss Stacey Ann Smith and Dr. Miller have, I am sure, told the truth."

Innocencio gulped, but before he could protest, his mentor continued:

"That is to say, Mr. Cowden did indeed promise marriage to both these ladies. As Dr. Miller claims, her fiancé undoubtedly told her he was coming aboard last night to present her with the ring. And as Miss Smith says, he in turn promised *her* he would renounce the professor and take her to wife."

"Yes," Innocencio interrupted, "yes, it is as I have said: he is run away from too much love!"

"That is how it was, Dean Weathergay," Dr. Miller said calmly. "You are right: he did come out to the boat to break off our engagement. But he didn't intend

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to marry Stacey, either. Maybe he was attracted to her for a time..." She looked away and drew a deep breath. "But he soon discovered, Father, that she was only interested in acquiring the Cortez ring, not Johnny Cowden!"

"I know you killed him," Stacey Smith gasped out. "You couldn't bear to let him go to someone young and attractive and leave you a thwarted old maid!"

Dr. Miller paled, but she remained deadly calm. "The boat has been searched," she said, "the bay dragged. Do you expect the Captain to believe that I killed Johnny and tied him to the leg of a bird? Or swam three miles to shore with him? He left this boat alive, and what happened to him after that..." She shrugged.

"Dean Weathergay," said the Captain, "we are where we were, are we not?"

"Take out your gun," the Dean said steadily, "and watch this company closely."

The Captain did so, his eyes bright and expectant. No one moved or spoke. We all watched the Dean as he turned again to the side of the craft and began to pull up the line he had let into the water with a dead fish dangling on it.

An amazing thing came up from the bay: the shimmering white skeleton of the fish!

"This is called the Bay of the Dead," the Dean explained in his dry voice, "because no dead animal matter can exist in this water for more than a few minutes. It will vanish as swiftly and completely as though some subterranean magician had waved his wand and changed mortal flesh into a string of bones.

"Anthropologists, like Dr. Miller, know this and use it. They know, you see, that this bay is infested by small scavengers of the sea known as amphopods and isopods. These creatures eat nothing living. But they can, as you have observed, provide a scientist with bone specimens which have been delicately and completely scoured.

"Dr. Miller put her net over the side last night, freighted with John Cowden's body. The isopods are particularly active at night. When morning came, she raised the net and let the burden dry upon the deck. Then she carefully stowed in the ship's lockers her lover's bones, among the others she had legitimately dug up in her archeological work.

"Mr. Cowden, what remains of him, is still aboard the *Amigo Mio*."

My dear Bishop, the truly surprising thing about the revelation of the professor's guilt was the behavior of Innocencio Valdez, that fine young man whom the Dean has spent these latter years guiding. He exhibited no jubilation at his freedom on the trip back in the police boat. Instead he sat beside the weeping, pitiful Dr. Miller, con-

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soling her in Spanish, and glared malevolently at Miss Smith, whom he apparently held more responsible for the death of John Cowden than the woman by whose hand Cowden actually died.

This morning the good Dean asked me to drive out with him along Frontera Road at the Bay of the Dead before taking my bus back to the United States. From the top of the sandy crest of the barren hills we saw the placid bay and the *Amigo Mio* still riding at anchor, flying the police flag.

Below us, down the slope, I could see Innocencio and little Pepe digging industriously in the sand.

"What do they do?" I asked the Dean.

"They are building a *crusado* for Mr. Cowden at the shore point closest to where he died."

I remembered having seen these crosses on the roadway from Nogales.

"They are good boys," the Dean said softly.

The gentle fragrance of the bay breeze fanned the air as we watched them. Innocencio held the cross firmly in a mound of wet cement. Pepe dropped a little cloth on the blessed arms and set a candle in a tin can at the foot, lighting it.

As we headed back to the Guaymas bus station, I remarked, "All the same, I cannot but feel sorry for that brilliant woman."

"But that is something that is not in our hands," the Dean said. "As the Psalmist says, Struthers, Unto God, the Lord, belong the exits of death."

Do you know, Sir, it was the first time I have ever heard the old churchman quote Scripture?

Your Obedient and Faithful
Curate of St. Margaret's,
Matthew Struthers.

St. Silas' Day, 1958
En route.

NEXT MONTH...

A new novelette about one of the most famous sleuthing teams in detective history – the spinster schoolteacher and the raffish criminal lawyer – Hildegarde and John J. in

CRAIG RICE and STUART PALMER's

Withers and Malone, Brain-Stormers

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**FREDERICK NEBEL**
TITLE:	***The Fifth Question***
TYPE:	Spy Story
AGENT:	Rivera, counter-espionage specialist
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	Now
COMMENTS:	*Did Rivera, with his European background, really know more about the workings of the European mind? Rivera was a gloomy scarecrow of a man; he was lonely, dogged —but most of all, he was dedicated ...*

WAYLAND WANTED TO BE FAIR. As Director of Personnel at the Photographic Laboratories Division of Electricol Industries, he considered himself responsible for the information leak on Miss Photo. Somewhere his system of security checks, or his judgment, had betrayed him. More than anything else now he wanted to discover and bring to justice the secret informer. But he did not think Rivera, the counter-espionage specialist from Washington, was being fair.

"In the matter of Josef Kaspien," he said, "you've gone beyond all reasonable limits of decency."

"One more interview," Rivera said.

Wayland swiveled his office chair and peered with harassed eyes through the tinted-glass window. Beyond the modernistic cubes and domes of the dispersed plant buildings the land rose in tiers of peaceful upland pasture. He felt his throat thicken with indignation.

"Why Kaspien?" he demanded, swiveling back to face Rivera. "You know as well as I do—you've had ample proof—that Josef Kaspien is as deaf as a doorknob. You've questioned him again and again—the same questions, over and over

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and over—and you've got nowhere. His story checks in every detail with the dossier of the refugee committee and in other respects with the story told by his cousin John Kaspien. The man's suffered enough at the hands of the secret police abroad. Why must you persist in hounding him?"

"One more interview," Rivera said.

Wayland gave him a bitter, uncertain smile. The trouble with Esteban Rivera, he supposed, was his European background, his belief that he knew the workings of the European mind better than did native-born Americans. Besides, he was one of those naturalized citizens who were almost embarrassingly dedicated.

But Wayland sighed. "Very well, I'll cooperate—but this is the last time. And I'll not sleep well tonight, I can tell you that."

"Many nights I do not sleep well," Rivera said. "Some nights I do not sleep at all."

He did not, Wayland thought, look as if he ever slept well. He was gaunt, dark, stoop-shouldered, with thinning hair and a beaked nose. He fidgeted. His clothes were drab, commonplace. He could have passed for an underpaid shipping clerk or bookkeeper in need of sun and fresh air.

"If you please," Rivera said, placing a typewritten sheet before Wayland. "These are the five questions to be asked by you. As you ask each question I will write it down on a card and hand the card to Kaspien. As you read, face me—do not face Kaspien. Your face is too emotional."

Wayland divided a dubious glance between the sheet of paper and the counter-espionage specialist. "This seems awfully roundabout," he complained. "Why not simply hand Kaspien this paper?" He frowned, setting his square jaw. "And why shouldn't I face him? If I'm going to connive in persecuting a man, at least I intend to face him while doing it."

"Do not face Kaspien," Rivera repeated evenly. "Face me at all times. Now send for him, if you please, sir."

Before he quite realized it Wayland was putting a call through the intercom for Kaspien. He felt oddly shaken. He felt as if this haggard scarecrow of a man, with his soft, quick voice, his tired doggedness, had made him act against his will. He took a breath, holding it; and because he was an intensely sympathetic man, he feared and dreaded the interview. He pitied poor Kaspien.

But when Josef Kaspien entered the office, five minutes later, Wayland took hope again. After two years the Director of Personnel found himself extremely fond of the little refugee. In fact, everybody in the plant liked the man. And it was through Wayland's own Personnel Development Program,

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which encouraged the employment of handicapped persons wherever practicable, that Kaspien had been taken on as attendant in the men's washroom and lounge.

Kaspien said, "Good morning, sir — good morning, sir," equally cheerful and polite to both Wayland and Rivera.

Rivera, looking very gloomy, flicked the back of a chair with his knuckles and then turned his hand down toward the seat. Seated, Kaspien occupied only a small portion of the chair. He blinked with anxious, inquiring wonder from one man to the other. He seemed almost pathetically eager to please.

Wayland picked up the typewritten sheet of paper, turned so that Kaspien was off behind his left ear, and faced Rivera. He read the first question: "Mr. Kaspien, how did you happen to come to America?" He watched Rivera write it down on a file card and then offer the card to Kaspien. He heard Kaspien say, "After the fighting was over and my country subjugated, and all my family exterminated, I escaped across the frontier. I told the refugee committee that I had a cousin living in America with whom my father had several times corresponded. But since my father had written of my deafness, I did not see how my cousin John could be expected to take the responsibility of sponsoring me here in this country, here in America."

The reply, as Wayland recalled it, was essentially the same as that elicited the day before. And Rivera, he saw, paid no great attention; he fidgeted, instead, with his pencil, holding another file card ready; and the glance he darted at Wayland urged him, testily, to get on with the next question.

Wayland continued: "Through the efforts of your cousin John, a foreman in our company, who first talked with me about you, you were brought to America two years ago. Had you ever seen your cousin John before?"

Rivera's pencil flew back and forth across the file card and out of the corner of his eye Wayland saw the card straight-armed toward Kaspien with a kind of brusque, offhand impatience. And then Rivera fiddled with his wrist watch, scowling at it, as if his time were being wasted.

"No, sir," Kaspien was saying. "My cousin John was born here in America. His father was my father's brother. All I was able to salvage from the old home place was a photograph of my father and John together, when they were on the soccer team. And some letters from John's father to my father. I was sorry I could not bring more."

Wayland was touched by the nostalgic quaver that had seeped into the man's voice. He had faith in the little man and he did not want that faith destroyed. He almost lapsed into reverie but the sound of Rivera fretfully clearing

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his throat brought him back to his onerous task.

He read the third question: "Mr. Kaspien, you've been the attendant in the men's washroom and lounge for almost two years. Have you ever found a memorandum, perhaps dropped accidentally, that in any way referred to Miss Photo?"

Wayland's voice — because his heart was not in it—had begun to sound hollow. And the sound of Rivera's pencil scratching and jabbing on the third file card seemed, by comparison, brutal and vicious. Nor did he see why Rivera had to thrust the card out that way, impatiently, as if it were a hot potato. And he wished Rivera would stop fidgeting with his wrist watch.

"No, sir, never," he heard Kaspien say; and then there was a faint giggle. "Miss Photo? It sounds — you will excuse me, sir — like what they call a pin-up."

Wayland smiled, seeing the humor in it, and stole a look at Rivera to see if the humor were shared. It was not. By Rivera's air of saturnine impatience you would have thought this whole idea was not his at all and that he wished to get done as soon as possible.

"Last summer," Wayland read from the fourth question, "you had two weeks' vacation. You visited our plants at Wing River and at Upper Falls. Did you by any chance see lying around there any paper or papers that in any way mentioned Miss Photo?"

This time, when he had finished writing on the file card, Rivera thrust it out with such an obvious display of impatience that Kaspien, in his haste or in his anxiety to please, dropped it. He was breathless by the time he recovered it, and the breathlessness carried over into his reply.

"No, I did not, sir," he said. "I was interested in the washroom and lounge facilities as compared with our own here. You will recall that when I returned I recommended we use here the same brand of grease solvent they use at the Wing River plant."

Wayland nodded, remembering. And then he heard Rivera slap down the last file card, heard the restless drumming of his pencil, saw his dark, half-lidded eyes awaiting the fifth question.

Wayland cleared his throat and was conscious of the pounding of his heart. He felt as breathless now as Kaspien had begun to sound. He was puzzled and confused because the four questions had been so innocuous, with no ostensible attempt to deceive or entrap. And the fifth seemed equally innocuous.

"Mr. Kaspien," he said, speaking with an effort, for he sensed there must be something malign and deadly here which he could neither see nor understand, "you began learning English when you were quite young because your mother believed that by a miracle you would regain your hearing and

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could then emigrate to America. Do you believe such a miracle will happen? Do you, Mr. Kaspien?"

Rivera snorted. His pencil struck at the file card with what Wayland thought was inordinate ill-temper and when he had finished he waved the card at Kaspien almost savagely. Wayland felt his throat close up, as if his very life were at stake. There was a humming in his right ear and he tugged at the lobe of it.

"Yes, sir," Kaspien was saying, "I live in hope that a miracle will happen. I pray that some day I will be able to hear."

Suddenly Rivera was on his feet a gaunt and gloomy scarecrow "Your prayers are answered right here and now, little man, quicker than you expected—but not in the way you expected. And don't give me that look of innocent, wide-eyed wonder. You can hear just as well as I can. You answered what Mr. Wayland asked you—*not what was asked in the writing on the card!*"

He tore the card from Kaspien's shaking fingers and flung it down before Wayland. The first and third sentences of the fifth question were written as Wayland had spoken them, but the middle sentence was not. Instead, Rivera had written: "Did you ever hear any washroom gossip about Miss Photo?"

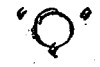
Wayland rose and faced the little man. "You betrayed me!" he choked. "You betrayed your cousin John!"

"If he is John's cousin, and I doubt it," Rivera said, almost casually: "Doubtless the entire family was liquidated and the photograph and letters used as a means of infiltrating Electricol Industries. Washroom gossip can get pretty careless in the presence of an attendant whom people believe to be deaf."

"You betrayed all of us," Wayland cried out, and the next instant he had Kaspien by the throat.

But Rivera came quickly between them, his voice dry and laconic: "Now, now, Mr. Wayland. We have their international courier in custody in New York, we have the informer here, and your Missile Photographic is safe. It's all in the day's work. And the night's. I knew I had been close to something, but not close enough, in the other interrogations. Last night it came to me. Either Kaspien could read with lightning swiftness—or he could hear and made only a pretense of reading."

Wayland turned from Kaspien, cursing himself for an emotional fool. He might have killed the man. And then he thanked God for lonely, dogged, dedicated men like Esteban Rivera.



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

a new story by

AUTHOR: **HELEN NIELSEN**

TITLE: ***Won't Somebody Help Me?***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: Los Angeles, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *What happens to a quiet, gentle man, a good husband, a kind father, when he is laid off, depression sets in, unemployment insurance runs out—when a darkness comes over his face and he begins to talk and act strangely?*

IT WAS LIKE ANY OTHER HOSPITAL except for the bars over the windows. The bars over the windows, the lock on the door, and the heavy wire cage where they put patients who became violent. But beyond violence is a quiet place where all cries fade to muted whimpers in the mind—until nothing remains but staring silence and no hope at all...

The first time the strange thing happened to Lonnie, his wife, Venita, was more puzzled than afraid. It wasn't easy to be afraid of Lonnie, quiet and gentle as he was. Those were the things that had attracted her to him that night at the dance on Ocean Park pier. She had been a conspicuous extra—the visiting cousin from Tulare taken along because there was nothing else to do with her; and he had been the only male on the stag line who seemed to notice her. Venita was an almost pretty girl, but shy; Lonnie was tall and sort of good-looking in an awkward way, and when he asked her to dance she felt an excitement she'd never known in all her seventeen years. They had three dances in virtual silence, then went out to inspect his new Chevy. Lonnie was quiet there, too, but persuasive.

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On the following Saturday they drove the Chevy to Las Vegas and were married. All Venita knew about her husband was that his father was a preacher in a small town in Texas, that he'd run away from home when he was fifteen, had been working in an aircraft plant for the past five years, and had saved enough money for the down payment on a six-room stucco house. All he knew about Venita was that she was an orphan from Tulare who didn't want to go back. It wasn't much to begin with, but in four and a half years Venita hadn't been sorry—or afraid.

Sometimes she did worry. Lonnie worked too hard. It was as if he had someone standing over him, whip in hand, driving him every waking moment. Dr. Barbour noticed it the time Lonnie got the flu and had to stay home for a week. It was when Stevie, the first baby, was only a few months old and the unpaid bills were still cluttering up the buffet. Lonnie wanted to keep on working. He was getting sick leave, but no overtime.

"Your husband is a driving man, Mrs. Payne," the doctor told her. "He wants to stay on his feet until he drops. Where does he think he's going in such a hurry?"

That might have been the first trouble sign; but Venita didn't realize it, and Dr. Barbour was a nice old man who spent more time with his rosebushes than with patients and wasn't looking for complications. And Lonnie never drove anyone but himself. He was wonderful to her and kind to the children. After the twins were born, Venita had been weak and nervous. Lonnie was still getting overtime then, but he'd come home after a long day at the factory, do the babies' laundry while she put dinner on the table, and then, on nice evenings, ask Mrs. Mandell next door to stay with the children while he took her for a drive in the hills. There was one favorite spot where they could park under the trees, open a few cans of beer, and watch the moon come up. Lonnie would talk then—talk about his big plans, of all he was going to do for her and the children. That was Lonnie—a sweet guy with no temper at all. That's why she was puzzled the first time the strangeness came over him.

It was one evening at dinner. Bobby was in his high chair, crying. Stevie and the twins had been good-natured, healthy babies; but Bobby was fussy and inclined to catch everything that came along. Maybe babies could catch things that hadn't come yet, that were just on the way. Venita thought of that later; but on this particular evening she knew exactly what was wrong.

"It's the shots," she told Lonnie. "I took Bobby down to the clinic for shots today. I took all the children. It's free, you know."

Lonnie didn't so much as look up. He was eating his franks and

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beans without seeming to hear, see, or even taste anything.

"It's a good thing something's free," he muttered.

"I asked why Bobby doesn't gain weight as fast as the other children did," Venita added, "and they said it was too early to tell — that I should come back when he gets over the shots."

"Maybe he isn't supposed to gain weight," Lonnie said.

That was the first strange thing. The words was surprising; they didn't seem to make sense.

"Not supposed to—?" she echoed.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

"Lonnie! What an awful thing to say!"

Lonnie put down his fork. He looked at her for several seconds—just as if he'd never seen her before—and then he looked at each of the children in the same way.

"Lonnie—"

She thought he was sick, but she couldn't reach him. He pushed back his chair and left the table. Before she could come to her feet, the front door had slammed behind him.

It was late when Lonnie returned — almost midnight. He came in quietly, the way he'd done during the years when there was so much overtime, and undressed in the bathroom so as not to awaken anyone. The room remained dark when he came in and got into bed beside her.

"Lonnie—"

He was flat on his back staring at the ceiling. She pulled closer to him, brushing her face against his bare shoulder. It was a signal they had. They were human beings and sometimes they quarreled — to be exact, sometimes Venita quarreled. Lonnie wouldn't really quarrel. He'd go off alone, as he'd done this night, and not return until he was all over being offended. Then, when they were alone, she'd draw near to him and soon everything would be all right. But it was different this night. When she reached out and placed her arm across his chest, she could feel his body go rigid. He didn't actually pull away from her, but he didn't respond. After a while Venita drew back her arm and leaned away from his shoulder. The last time she looked at him before falling asleep, he was still staring at the ceiling.

On payday Venita learned that Lonnie had received his notice.

If it hadn't happened so suddenly, it might have been easier on Lonnie; but the cancellation of a government contract was somehow as final as death.

"It's the same for everybody," Lonnie explained. "The Chief Engineer got severance just like the rest of us."

"Maybe the company will get a new contract," Venita said. "Or maybe those men from Seattle—"

Lonnie cut her short.

"That was last winter when they

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started the layoffs. Seattle is in worse shape than Los Angeles now. Nobody's hiring. That's all the guys have been talking about for months. Nobody's hiring any more."

"Then there'll be some other kind of job."

"I'm a tail assembler," Lonnie said. "That's all I've ever been—a tail assembler."

He was frightened. When Venita realized that, she tried to encourage him. There was the employment insurance — twenty-six weeks it would run. That was six months—something would turn up in half a year. Wasn't that what the Employment Office was for—to find jobs for men and men for jobs? The state didn't want to pay out that money any more than Lonnie wanted to accept it; they'd place him in no time at all. Meanwhile, it would be fun to have him around the house. They'd never had much chance to get acquainted, with him working such long hours for so many years. Besides, there were things to do: screens to paint, a garden to spade—

In the fourth week of the layoff, Mrs. Mandell spoke to Venita over the back fence.

"I never seen a man with such energy," she said. "Look at your husband, Mrs. Payne. All afternoon digging in the hot sun!"

Venita left the fence and walked back to him. Some men worked in a garden to relax; Lonnie might have been digging for gold. He stopped to wipe the sweat from his face as she reached him, and the sun in his eyes gave him a glassy stare.

"My old man used to say I was the laziest boy he knew," he remarked. "I'd chop more cotton in half a day than he could chop in two, but he still said I was lazy."

"Lonnie," Venita said softly, "don't—"

"I'm not lazy, Venita."

"I know that, Lonnie."

"They just don't have a job for me."

"They will have soon. The papers keep saying they will."

"But next week's Stevie's birthday, and we promised him a three-wheeler."

"And he'll get one—later. Maybe for Christmas."

"Christmas—"

Lonnie leaned on the spade, staring off at something only he could see. Just when Venita had decided he wasn't going to speak again, he said:

"I never did believe it."

"Believe what, Lonnie?"

"That stuff about Joseph and Mary and the angel of the Lord. My old man said I was a black sinner and would suffer for sure. A real black sinner."

And then Lonnie went back to punishing the earth with his spade.

On the sixteenth week of the layoff, Lonnie drew a job reference. It didn't materialize. He had started working when jobs were

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easy and all anybody needed was an able body and enough common sense to follow orders. Now times had changed.

"They wanted a college man," Lonnie told her. "Can you imagine —a college man! High School at the very least. I could have done the work. I've worked since I was fourteen."

"Maybe you could go to night school," Venita suggested.

"At my age? I'd feel silly."

"But people lots older than you go to night school. You have the time—"

She didn't say any more. There was a darkness that came over Lonnie's face at times and a sudden turning away. It wasn't fun to have him home any more.

Lonnie's birthday fell in the twenty-fifth week. Finances were getting awfully tight by that time; but Venita asked Mrs. Mandell to stay with the children, then splurged on a couple of steaks and half a dozen cans of beer so they could drive up to the mountains and be alone again. It had been a long time, but the old camping spot and its magic hadn't changed. The tension between them ebbed away, and as the beer ran low and the moon lifted high, Lonnie came back to her. It was good. It was so good that all the evil days fell away and there was nothing to fear . . .

Three weeks after the unemployment insurance ran out, Venita went to Dr. Barbour. Lonnie drove her to the office in his old Chevy. One of the pistons had been knocking badly for months, but there wasn't anything they could do about it. It was tough because it meant less would come of the *For Sale* sign that Lonnie had lettered on the rear window.

He was sitting in the waiting room when she came out. He looked up at her and for the first time Venita was afraid. His eyes had a cornered look—like those of an animal that's been kicked and beaten and awaits the next blow. Dr. Barbour was so cheerful with his congratulations that she had the dread suspicion Lonnie would have liked to kill him on the spot. Driving home, she tried to be optimistic. She still had relatives in Tulare. Maybe they could borrow—

"I used to make a hundred dollars a week," Lonnie said. "More with overtime. Remember the week I got so much extra time there was a hundred and sixty bucks?"

Lonnie's knuckles were white on the steering wheel.

"I remember," she said. "And you'll make that again — more even."

"No, not any more."

"Lonnie, don't say such things! We're so young—"

"Not any more," he repeated. "It's the judgment. The sins of the fathers visited on the children."

By this time Venita had learned there was nothing to do when Lonnie got into such a mood but

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let him talk it out. Later it would be as if nothing had happened. That evening, after dinner, he went out and came back with a quart of ice cream for the children, and they had a little celebration and the usual instructions about helping Mama by being good. Lonnie was in high spirits then.

"I've been thinking," he told Venita, after all the children were in bed, "and I've got this thing figured out. It's been in my mind, see? I hated taking that insurance money. It hurt my pride being lined up and asked all those questions every week. Well, that's all over now. I'm my own free man again and now I've really got something to work for. I'll get a job this week. You'll see. I'll get a swell job this week—a hundred, a hundred and a quarter at least!"

He almost sobbed the last words, and that was the real beginning of her fear. From that night on Venita never relaxed.

The first time Venita spoke to Dr. Barbour about Lonnie, the old man almost laughed in her face. Something wrong with Lonnie? Why, he'd known the young man since the first time they came to see him, when she was expecting Stevie. A fine young man—loyal, dependable, hard-working.

"But that's just it," Venita protested. "He isn't working. He hasn't worked for such a long time that he's lost confidence in himself. He acts so strange and says such strange things—things I don't understand. Then, when I ask him what he means, he doesn't remember having said anything at all."

Dr. Barbour stopped laughing, but his eyes still smiled.

"Do you know," he said, "that Mrs. Barbour is always accusing me of that very thing? Now, Mrs. Payne, you've been in a family way often enough to know how your nerves can play tricks on you at such a time. Lonnie has a lot on his mind, that's all. If he's worrying about my fee, tell him to stop. His credit's good with me. I have faith in that young man, and I think you had better have faith in him too."

Faith. The word sounded fine and strong in Dr. Barbour's office; but Lonnie was sick. No matter what anyone said, Venita knew that. There are sicknesses people recognize and understand: measles or chicken pox or something organic; but Lonnie's sickness was more dangerous. He was like a man drowning on dry land, with no way to reach him because he didn't know anything was wrong.

After a while he stopped looking for work, and something inside him began to die. He never left the house, except to work in the yard or play with the children. He seemed to be ashamed for the neighbors to see him at home. In the evening he took to watching an evangelist on television until it was a relief when a tube blew out and

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there was no money to replace it. Once in a while he talked big again, reminding her of all the money he used to make and of all the money he would make when that good job came along. It was no use trying to talk him into settling for anything less. Lonnie would just close up and not talk at all. It was a time of terrible tension and strain, never knowing when or how the breaking point would come.

And then Bobby took sick. He'd never been really well, and when the cough developed, nothing Dr. Barbour or the clinic could do seemed to help at all. It was a torturous thing—hard on the baby and nerve-wracking for everyone else. They moved the crib into their own bedroom so he wouldn't disturb the other children, and that only brought it closer to them.

On the third night Venita awakened with a start. She always slept at the edge of awareness now. She turned her head and saw that Lonnie wasn't in the bed bedside her. Bobby! The thought came with a sharp wrench of panic that brought her up to a sitting position in the bed. The night light wasn't on; but she could see Lonnie's tall shadow standing over the crib looking down. Bobby was quiet.

"Lonnie—"

She whispered the word, sliding out of bed to stand beside him.

"Lonnie, what's wrong?"

She thought at first that he hadn't heard her. He didn't move and his face was an expressionless mask in the pale window light. Then he said,

"Do you remember Job?"

"Who?" Venita asked.

"A man in the Bible—a rich man. Then the Devil came and took everything away from him—his riches, his wife, his children. One by one, they were all taken away."

"Lonnie!"

She almost screamed his name. It was terrifying to hear him say such things over Bobby's crib. The sound startled him. She saw the dazed shock come into his eyes as he stared first at the crib, then back at the bed, trying to realize why he was on his feet. Then Bobby, awakened by the sound, began to whimper. Instantly, Lonnie had the child in his arms.

"Poor little fellow—Daddy's little fellow. Hush, now. You're safe, sonny. You're safe with Daddy. Venita, where's that medicine the doctor left? No, don't you go looking for it in your nightgown. You get back into bed. I'll take care of it—"

Lonnie trailed off down the hall to the bathroom, still consoling the baby on his shoulder, and Venita stood alone with the dread flowing through her like cold poison. Lonnie was two men! She'd seen it—there in the darkened room she'd seen two men in one. He was sweet and gentle and kind; but way down in the depth of him was an awful darkness that the worry

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and strain were bringing to the surface. And what if the dark Lonnie came all the way? What if the Lonnie she loved—the Lonnie who loved her and his children—was lost completely?

She couldn't go back to bed—not now. The things he'd been saying at Bobby's crib wouldn't let her. She found her robe and slippers, hurrying in order to get away before he returned from the bathroom. He'd ask questions for which there were no answers.

The telephone had been taken out months ago; but Mrs. Mandell knew Bobby wasn't well and had said they could use hers any time, day or night. Because it was night, Venita came to the door with her now-heavy body encased in a loose flannel robe and her graying hair wound up in curlers. Of course Mrs. Payne could use the telephone! Was it Bobby? Was the poor dear worse? Venita didn't try to explain. She was half crying by the time her ringing aroused Dr. Barbour and her mind fumbled for words.

"Dr. Barbour, could you come, please. No, it's not Bobby. I mean, yes, he's still got the cough, but that's not why I called you. It's the other—what we talked about before."

He was an old man and he didn't awaken easily. She tried again, but she couldn't say too much with Mrs. Mandell hovering anxiously at her shoulder.

"Don't you remember, Doctor? I told you I was afraid, terribly afraid—"

"Now, Mrs. Payne, have you been having a bad dream? Why don't you take some of those sleeping pills I left with you and have a good night's sleep?"

"But I'm afraid. I have to talk to you—"

"Tomorrow, Mrs. Payne. I'll stop by first thing in the morning. We'll all sit down together over a pot of hot coffee and talk this thing out. Everything will be all right. You'll see."

There was nothing more she could do. Could she tell him Lonnie had frightened her, talking about a man named Job? He would laugh at her again. She was only an overwrought expectant mother having the usual foolish fears. She placed the telephone back on its cradle. It was too heavy to hold any longer.

"Such a shame," Mrs. Mandell said, "such an awful shame! A nice young couple with so much trouble coming all at once. You can be grateful you got such a considerate husband."

"Yes," Venita said numbly.

"I always say, a woman with a considerate husband—she's rich no matter what happens. You look tired, my dear. A cup of tea, maybe?"

Mrs. Mandell waited for an answer, her head cocked to one side like a motherly hen clucking over her flock. Warm, sympathetic—and

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so far away there was no use even trying to reach her.

"No," Venita said. "No, thank you. I have to get back now. Thank you for the use of the telephone."

She was more than tired; she was defeated. She went back to a house that was completely quiet again, and that made the whole thing seem just a bad dream. Perhaps Dr. Barbour was right after all. Just a bad dream. Lonnie had left the light burning in the bathroom, and a part of her weary mind remembered the need to keep the bills down. She turned it out on her way back to bed. In the bedroom the night light was burning and by its dim light she could see Lonnie putting Bobby back into the crib. She watched him from the doorway, his long, lanky body bent nearly double over the low bed. The baby was quiet now, but Lonnie didn't move. Puzzled, Venita walked closer to the crib until she could look down into it—and then she screamed.

"No—Lonnie! No!"

For just an instant she was paralyzed with horror—but instants were precious. Lonnie was pressing the pillow down against Bobby's face. It took all her strength to drag him away. He was like a robot that had been set to do a certain task and couldn't hear or respond to anything but force. All her strength—and where it came from she didn't know. Only one thing did she know then—the pillow. She had to get that pillow away from Lonnie...

It was just like any other hospital if she didn't look at the windows, and she didn't. She looked at Lonnie. He stood beside the bed gazing down at her with love, pity, and something vague and faraway in his eyes. She was too sleepy to analyze it. The sedation they'd given her was taking hold, and she couldn't remember very much any more. When he stooped down and kissed her lightly on the forehead, it seemed as if she must have had the baby already and this was the customary first visit.

But that wasn't right. There was still something nagging at her mind, something leftover from the turmoil and violence that had preceded silence. A scene. Three people in the scene. No, just two people at first—just Lonnie standing beside her at Bobby's crib with a wild, bewildered expression in his eyes.

"Venita, what are you doing with that pillow? What are you *doing?*"

She did have the pillow by then. She had it after ripping it out of his hands.

"What are you doing, Venita? What have you done?"

He didn't remember. The struggle for the pillow had brought him to his senses, and now he believed only what he saw. The pillow was in her hands, not his. He turned back to the crib. Bobby was alive

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and whimpering. Bobby was safe.

"Thank God for that!" Mrs. Mandell exclaimed. "Thank God, Mr. Payne! Thank God you stopped her in time!"

Now the third person was in the scene, summoned by Venita's scream; but she had everything wrong, too. It wasn't that way, Mrs. Mandell. It wasn't the way it looks!

"The poor dear. We should have realized that she was going to pieces. Call the doctor, Mr. Payne. Call him now—right away. The poor, poor dear—"

But it wasn't that way—it wasn't that way at all!

The scene faded into warm, creeping nothingness until there was nothing but Lonnie's face above her. Sweet Lonnie. Gentle Lonnie. Loyal in spite of all the things she'd said and sobbed about him. Useless things because nobody believed her. Hadn't Mrs. Mandell seen her with the pillow still in her hands, and didn't Dr. Barbour remember how upset she had been on the telephone? He knew what had to be done.

Lonnie's face began to float away.

"Now you have a good rest, honey," he said. "That's all the doctors say you need—a real good rest. And don't you worry about anything at home. You know I'll take good care of the children. You know that, don't you?"

He smiled and even through the smile that strange thing was in his eyes. He turned and walked down the aisle toward the door that would lock him out and lock her in, and with every step she wanted to cry out and run after him; but the drug was as strong as a straitjacket, and there was nothing left of protest but the whimper in her mind.

"Don't let him go—please don't let him go to the children! He's the sick one—can't you see? Won't somebody see? Won't somebody help me?"

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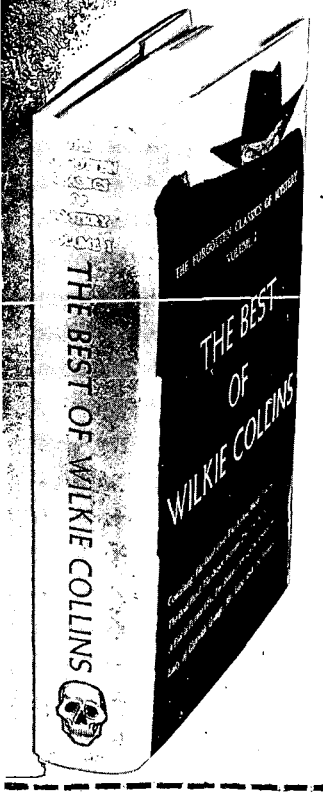

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